RAMBLES *with* ANATOLE FRANCE

by
His Secretary
SÁNDOR KÉMERI

"ANATOLE FRANCE TO THE LIFE"
—Emile Henriot in "Le Temps"

These conversations with Anatole France, taken down from day to day by his secretary and friend, Madame Sándor Kémeri, have the charm and originality of a new work by Anatole France himself. The famous author comments in these pages on all phases of European history and culture. Perhaps the most fascinating chapters are those devoted to Anatole France's tour in Italy, every incident in which is illuminated by the great philosopher's running commentary on the history, art and literature of the country. Notable, too, is the account of a long talk with the great sculptor Rodin.

WITH 32 PLATES ON PLATES

INCLUDING FRONTISPIECE)

RAMBLES WITH ANATOLE FRANCE

FRANCE LOOKING OVER HIS TANAGRA STATUES

RAMBLES WITH ANATOLE FRANCE

BY

SÁNDOR KÉMERI

(MME. GEORGES BÖLÖNI)

TRANSLATED FROM THE HUNGARIAN

BY

EMIL LENGYEL

LONDON
ERNEST BENN LIMITED
BOUVERIE HOUSE, FLEET ST.
1927

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TO

R. B. S.

IN DEEP GRATITUDE FOR AIDING

MY DEAR FRIENDS

INTRODUCTION

AFTER a short illness, Madame Arman de Caillavet died on 12th January 1910, a mirror in her hand, reflecting for the last time her smile possessed of a spiritual charm. The previous night Anatole France called upon her, as he had done for the last thirty years. Holding his hands to his sides, where he felt some pain, he bid her *au revoir* earlier than usual. This was the last time he saw her alive.

The death of the friend who had stimulated his genius called forth in France a state of mental and physical depression, which was full of the most dire possibilities. I saw him often in those days, partly as his physician, but mainly as a mourning companion. For days he stayed in bed without even touching any food. He was a slave of his grief and liked to discourse, in a feeble voice, on the philosophic convenience of suicide.

Where could he find a woman's sympathetic soul, of which he stood in so great a need ? The Fates sent him Madame Bölöni.

I can visualize her : simplicity and purity incar-

nate. Her very presence meant peace and calm. She was a well-known author in Hungary writing under the *nom de plume*, Sándor Kémeri. She had called a few times on Anatole France, asking for a message for the inhabitants of the Danube Valley. Her heart—the heart of a woman—told her that the life of a great man was in danger. Without hesitation she left everything to bring him back to life. France responded to her selfless devotion. He confided to her a great task, the organization of the letters, so beautiful and full of wisdom, of his departed friend.

During the whole winter he sat most of the time curled up in one of his old armchairs, inactive, dazed. He did not interrupt the regularity of his usual Sunday morning receptions, but the effort to disguise his real sentiments told heavily on his nerves. When all he wanted was to rest and forget, the visitors spied on his thoughts and tried to induce him to mental acrobatics for their own amusement. He became excitable, uncertain of his sympathies. What he liked one day he turned down with disgust the following morning. Emaciated, he often fled to his bed.

When spring came we prevailed upon him to leave for Italy with Madame Bölöni. They would first go to Naples. I counted upon the salutary effect of that gem of nature, where the gods of ancient Rome still seem to be alive. Then they would come northward and I would join them as soon as I could. They left Paris, and a short time afterwards I joined them. We went together to Assisi, Sienna, Florence, Bologna, Ravenna. This was the last trip France made in Italy. Its sacred soil gave him his health, his courage to live and a new inspiration.

The topic of this book is the convalescence of a great spirit, for whose recovery the world is indebted to Madame Bölöni. Her story is clear and accurate, as sweet and calm as she is.

When they left for Italy, the Master was sixty-six years old and had just arrived at a turning-point in his career. There were three stages in his life. He had a sky-storming youth as a " savage " poet. His mature years were that of a Latin Goethe. Finally, he had a golden autumn, when, free from the conventions of every-day life, the Master followed the commands of his nature and gave

free rein to his sovereign will. His life began with hesitation and ended with noble audacity.

The time described in this book corresponds to the preparation of two books: "Les Dieux ont Soif" and "La Révolte des Anges." "I am writing one book for the public and another for myself," said their author.

"Les Dieux ont Soif" was to be a short novelette. There are several other books by France which in the original design were not destined to become full-fledged novels. This was the case with "Thaïs," which, initially, was a very short story, whose manuscript, if I remember rightly, was in the possession of Henri Roujon. "La Rötisserie," too, was, at the beginning, merely a Christmas story.

As soon as Evariste, the soft-hearted executioner of "Les Dieux," had been placed in the French Revolution, instead of the time of the Holy Inquisition, as suggested at first, the work was going fast. France had spent many years in making that epoch live in his imagination. In the bookstore of his father, who specialized in the literature of the Revolution, he saw, as a child, the old men, who, in their youth, had heard the drums of Citoyen

Santerre, the brewer-general. Driven by curiosity and shivering, he had often gone to the Passage du Commerce, to see the houses in which Marat and Danton lived. He told me when he was fifty that he could not even then enter this passage without a chill running down his back. He often read to us an eloquent chapter in the memoirs of Jacques Claude Beugnot, the Girondist and later Royalist, in which he makes Jean Bon Saint-André describe the sittings of the *Comité du Salut Public*. France admired Robespierre as he admired Lenin. He was a magnanimous judge of great men who, at the price of their lives, had changed the world. It was only the mediocre fanatics who filled him with horror. " Les Dieux " was written at a breathless pace, in self-forgetful exaltation.

" Les Anges," which later became " La Révolte des Anges," was created differently. He wrote it at his leisure. He began to write this apologue to amuse Madame Arman, whom he had made interested in Montesquieu and Bossuet. He wanted to demonstrate that there is nothing reasonable in history, that it lacks a " divine " plan, and that every new progress is accomplished by a great mind in

revolt against the providential order of things. In the Book of Henoch he had culled the old fable about the angels fallen from Heaven, who are lovers of mortal women and the inventors of useful arts. This is the book which charms me most. The flute of the gardener makes me forget my cares. " The night hearkened to the flute of Nectaire. . . . A lark, awakened in a near-by sand dune, shot into the air, attracted by the new sounds, paused an instant in mid-air and rapidly flew toward the orchard of the musician. The sparrows of the vicinity left the crevices of the old walls and settled in groups on the sill of the window from which issued the sounds they liked better than barley and oats. . . . The spiders, far from their webs, their legs trembling, assembled in a corner of the ceiling. A small lizard, having forced its slender body between the threshold and the door, remained there fascinated, and one could see in the granary a bat, holding itself fast with its nails, the head downward, balancing itself, half-sleeping, to the rhythm of the charmed flute."

The conversation of Anatole France was as entrancing as the sounds of Nectaire's flute. It was

always adapted to the cadence of the thought, limpid, coloured by the subtle grace of politeness, packed with ideas, marvellously well proportioned to the mental dimensions of the interviewer, spontaneous and natural.

When speaking, France was looking for his words, hesitated, even stammered a little, rubbed his thumb against the other fingers, and often corrected himself. He talked in the same manner as he wrote, but in print one could not see the erasures. He uttered no word that was not just, luminous, winged. He was Plato come to life, Plato undeceived, after having read Rabelais, Racine and Voltaire.

Those who met him experienced his extraordinary faculty to feel the joys and the worries of others, to help and to encourage. He himself suffered when seeing the suffering of others. He practised the gentle art of irony only on the well-fed. In all his life he remained faithful to the two Muses of his youth : Pity, first and foremost, and then Irony.

When God Krishna danced with the shepherdesses each of them thought he was dancing with her alone, although they all were dancing at the same

time. Listening to the Master, we all felt exalted individually and thought we were selected for some higher purpose. His conversation was an immense book of a hundred thousand pages, which, if unstitched, lost its leaves for those who could not appreciate its tremendous wealth. We owe much to Madame Bölöni for having saved for us so many leaves intact.

France used to say that in a mediocre mind the universe destroyed itself. On the other hand, in his mind the universe was blossoming. Real and durable, because fictitious, his universe had its own climate, its music and its population of sages and knaves.

France did not like to be called immortal. His attitude was that of his favourite, M. Bergeret, "I am satisfied with being eternal."

Time is a cheat. All that is, no longer exists. Death exerts its cruel power only on appearances. It interrupts material relationships and gives vigour to spiritual values. It suffices that Anatole France was. Due to his influence, the great All, which is the Universal Mind, has undergone a change.

PARIS, 1926. PAUL-LOUIS COUCHOUD.

TRANSLATOR'S FOREWORD

MME. ARMAN DE CAILLAVET was more than a friend to Anatole France. She was his inspiration, the occasion for the bursting forth of his genius. She had so transformed her salon that it became a place of worship, dedicated to the cult of the Master.

Mme. de Caillavet was a severe critic. When France reached the zenith of his career, acclaimed as the greatest writer of his country, and perhaps of the world, she continued to stir his creative energies to new efforts. His world-wide fame did not blind her to those defects which are common even in the greatest of mortals. She insisted that he be an immortal. One of the biographers of France tells us that, in a fit of impetuosity, he once threw the manuscript of a novel into the fire because Mme. de Caillavet suggested some radical changes in it.

France was an epicurean. He enjoyed talking, but writing was an arduous task for him. In his

conversations he delighted in the joys of creation. When writing he felt acutely the pangs of effort. Besides, in conversation he could be more unconventional. The written word is shackled by many inelastic rules. If it had not been for Mme. de Caillavet, Anatole France would have been known in his age only as a charming *causeur*. Posterity would not have fallen heir to so large a share of the manifestations of his genius.

On 12th January 1910, Mme. de Caillavet died. Dr. Paul-Louis Couchoud, the friend and physician of Anatole France, tells us of the agony of those days. The previous evening France came to see her as he had done for thirty years. For some time it seemed as if France could not long survive the death of his best friend. He remained in bed for many days, practically without food and almost motionless. It was at that time that the author of this book, Mme. Georges Bölöni, began to play so important a rôle in the life of France.

She was known in Hungary, her native land, under the *nom de plume*, Sándor Kémeri. She descended from an ancient noble family of Transyl-

vania, which at that time was a part of the land of the Magyars. In that mountainous country the traditions of an Asiatic culture still linger, forming a curious mixture with a civilization up to date in its Westernism. She had the reputation as an eminent writer, possessing an intimate knowledge of the Orient, many parts of which were not yet explored in those days by journalistic pioneers.

It was as a newspaper correspondent that Mme. Bölöni first called on Anatole France. Although he was diffident towards strangers, beyond the conventional civility, he quickly perceived in her a kindred soul. In her presence he lifted the smiling mask which hid his agony. She saw that there was a task for her to perform : to save Anatole France for humanity.

Their relationship was that of master and disciple. France was an old man, broken in spirit. Her first task was to lift him from despondency. She collected Mme. de Caillavet's letters, thus establishing a living spiritual contact with the memory of the dead. When the dangerous symptoms of depression slowly gave way to a reawakened

interest in life, she and Dr. Couchoud induced France to undertake a trip to Italy.

In the early spring of 1910, Anatole France left for Italy accompanied by Mme. Bölöni. Dr. Couchoud joined them later. First they went to Naples and from there they made a pilgrimage to Rome and other Italian cities. This was the last trip of Anatole France to the site of the culture of ancient Rome.

The Anatole France whom this book presents is different in many respects from the sardonic Titan whom we have grown accustomed to see in him. "Conversations with Anatole France," by Nicholas Ségur, makes us see the continuous spiritual revolutions and reactions which transformed his life into a manifestation of burning passions and inward struggles, a never-ending battle for self-expression and for the encompassing of human life in refractory words. Jacques Roujon perceives a fundamental conservatism in the spiritual life of France, who, in "La Vie et les Opinions d'Anatole France," is, paradoxically, a "right winger," and upholder of traditions and ancient customs. The

hero of Jeanne Maurice Pouquet's " Le Salon de Madame Arman de Caillavet " is the great jester thrust upon the throne. Marcel le Goff's book and Brousson's volume are attempts at preserving for posterity some of the verbal gems of a conscious genius whose most inspired moments were those when congenial company stirred his thoughts to soaring flights.

Mme. Bölöni's book records, mainly, France's comments during their trip to Italy. They were now in the temple of his art. If there was a country in which France could find relief from the aching consciousness of his loss it was Italy. We know that the Latin genius, his guiding star, gave a definite tendency to his writings. In these surroundings his scorn for human baseness gave way to admiration for human greatness. In Italy he was the real Anatole France, the pious believer, the devout pilgrim. Although he disclaimed any connection with dogmatic creeds, France was intensely religious. He absorbed life and submerged himself in it. Its secrets revealed themselves to his wisdom because he gave himself up to it, convinced of its great mis-

sion. He reached the point of human wisdom where one becomes a founder of a new religion. It was in line with his extreme individualism—in this Anatole France was a typical Frenchman—that his should be an individual religion and individual philosophy.

During their trip in Italy, France had a companion as devout a believer in Beauty as himself. Mme. Bölöni is a poet both by profession and by her interpretation of Life's meaning. She idolized him and he needed idolatry, coming from so pure and unselfish a source as her enthusiasm. We can visualize her listening with wistful intentness to every word the Master—her Master—uttered. She stored those words in her memory and every night she put them down, those revelations—her Bible. She was grateful for every word ; they meant much in her life. And France, the teacher of millions, liked to teach her.

This spiritual relation was reciprocal. We have evidence in the writings of France that Mme. Bölöni left a lasting mark on him. Extremely sensitive to inspiration, if it happened to harmonize

with the urge of his genius, she was a new experience and a revelation to France.

Mme. Bölöni is, and was, a believer in the "international" of all good men. When political reaction was at its worst in Hungary she had to suffer cruelly for this belief. Yet, she is a typical Hungarian—a Transylvanian—traditionally and atavistically. Although she is a master of her emotions, nevertheless there is an underlying, and partly concealed, passion in her, characteristic of her temperamental race. This is the passion of a missionary who proclaims her message irrespective of the consequences.

Mme. Bölöni acquainted France with the customs and literature of her country. This, too, was a great experience in his life. She was full of glowing enthusiasm when speaking about a Hungarian poet, Andreas Ady, of whom the world, outside of Hungary, knows very little. She translated for France some of Ady's most "untranslatable" poems, and he was amazed at their profundity. This communion with a foreign genius corroborated France's belief in the universality of the human

mind. His fallen angels have no nationality, but those who know will perceive in several of them the characteristics which have elevated Andreas Ady from the mass of his contemporaries.

Everything that Anatole France said or wrote is interesting for us. It is doubly interesting to overhear him speaking to his most intimate friends —almost to himself. His words to Mme. Bölöni are the words of an introspective France. He opened his soul to her, his *alter ego*, without irony and the bitter satisfaction of self-torturing scepticism and sardonic laughter. This is an Anatole France with whom the admirers of the Master will, doubtless, be happy to become acquainted.

EMIL LENGYEL.

1926.

PREFACE

IN the winter of 1910 grief told heavily on the humour and health of Anatole France. After he had returned from South America, he lost the woman who meant most to him, Madame de Caillavet. Her death ended a friendship of thirty years which had made the mid-day and twilight of their lives an adventure of blissful memories. When they had become thus separated, France's sorrow was mingled with a cruel feeling of self-reproach. If there is a human being who has never sinned against those whom he loved, he has a right to scoff at this sacred, self-accusing grief. In the hours of trial Doctor Couchoud and I attended him constantly. He did not conceal from us how profound his sorrow was and how torturing his soul's doubts. He confided to me the arrangement of Mme. de Caillavet's inspired letters to him, which gave testimony of her indomitable energy.

During that whole winter France was very

downcast. He would sit in his gobelin-covered chair during long, long afternoons, scarcely speaking, plunged in harassing thoughts. He did see visitors on his "at home" days, but the people who called were uncongenial to his sentiments. They bored him and he concealed from them his face of sorrow. When he was alone with us, he complained that he no longer could stand visitors as they made him nervous and uneasy. He had the feeling that he was sitting in a show-window where every passer-by felt free to take a look at him. They were spying on his thoughts and irritating his wits to have their fun. He had become restless and whimsical. What he liked one day he could not bear on the morrow. Although he was not sick, he would go to bed, so enervating was his grief.

As there was serious cause for worry we wanted to help him regain his former spirits. On a spring-like day, near the end of the winter, we decided, at the recommendation of his physician, Doctor Couchoud, to take him to Italy, which France had always loved and whither he had yearned to return.

Although he was sixty-six then, his enthusiasm

when he beheld a work of art knew no bounds and he was indefatigable in hunting them up. France was admirable during our trip when breathing in the spirit of ancient Italy on top of the Pincio in Rome, near the busts of Horace and Virgil, or resting his elbows on the stone-laced balustrade, musing over the glories of the eternal city. In Ravenna he contemplated with bated breath the superb mosaics, Dante's tomb and forest. In Pineta he followed the footpaths of the great visionary of Hell. He was at home in the town of the Lys Rouge in Renaissance-reared Florence. He called it the town of the geniuses, and to visit its museums and churches was his greatest pleasure. In Milano he would look for hours at the Cathedral and Leonardo da Vinci's " Last Supper." Bologna's quaint cemetery surprised him. In Parma he took a rest and let his creative energies relax in the balmy atmosphere of the place. On we went to Perugia, Sienna, Assisi, and many other charming Italian towns, where we spent only a short time, enjoying the prospect of a new visit—a desire which never could be gratified.

After this trip in Italy, which was the Master's last one, and which he, rejuvenated, enthusiastic and inquisitive, enjoyed immensely, came old age. War came, then sickness and finally death. This book, which in many parts is permeated with sadness, enveloping many of Anatole France's days, I had desired to dedicate to him for having taught me how to penetrate art's secrets. But war and the many trials which intervened frustrated the fulfilment of this wish. And now, instead of to the living Anatole France, I dedicate this book to the memory of the dead Master.

Sándor Kéméri.

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I
VILLA SAÏD

RAMBLES WITH ANATOLE FRANCE

I

VILLA SAÏD

NOT far from the Arc de Triomphe, Villa Saïd, a calm little street, loses itself among the trees of the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne. Villa Saïd does not designate a house, as its name would imply. It is a tiny passage undisturbed by the crowd, and the flashy-looking Parisian shops. On top of the trees lining the pavement, thrushes sing, while below a few promenading couples converse in hushed tones. Life's din does not penetrate this place, neither does its vanity. I stop in front of a two-story house whose exterior does not display any of the vagaries of ultra-modern architecture. Its curtained windows, whose noble shape betrays the artist's hand, stand guard behind the slender trees. I pull the handle of the bell, a bronze statuette dating back to the Renaissance of Florence, and the housekeeper, Madame Bocart, known as "Old

Josephine," opens the door after having peeped through a grated window. The severity of her face relents when she sees that it is not an intruding stranger who begs admission. She has been the housekeeper for thirty years, and knows every visitor of her master.

In the ante-chamber, near the carved Italian church pews, I leave my coat and hat, absorbed in contemplation of the well-fed faces of the angels in a Sienna picture. Old Josephine, worried, complains that " monsieur " had been reading very late last night. " The candles had all burned to the end," she murmurs, " and he would have liked to continue perusing the parchments of old books. It is those parchments that make his fingers so pale and lean. He pays no attention to me, however long I may plead. He feels well only when with his books. He is awaiting you in the library, filling his lungs with dust."

I slowly mount the stairs, stopping every now and then. All around me are Italian pictures, arranged according to schools: Renaissance and Gothic carvings, Persian, Hindoo and Italian

ceramics, bronze bas-reliefs, and an Athenian *stele funeraire*—a majestic marble tomb—an object of admiration to all of us.

Anatole France's library on the first floor was separated from his bedroom by a narrow corridor, full of portraits and books. I lifted the heavy oriental knocker and knocked at the door which he had bought in a grand-seigneurial palace of Northern Italy many years ago.

" Come in," he answered, and his voice had an ingratiating tone. He rose from his cushions, dark green gobelins of the sixteenth century, and politely advanced two steps toward me. " What is the colour of the Seine this morning ? How do the charming old houses of the Place Dauphine look ? "

" Our holy river is beautiful this morning in its gold-striped, bluish-green brilliancy," I answered, " and the shadow of the pillars of Pont Neuf is as beautiful as it is on the old etching you gave me yesterday to stimulate my love for Paris and its ancient stones. I am indebted to you, Master, for having given me the power to understand what the old stones speak to me."

He grasped my hand and bade me sit down opposite him, at the other end of his desk, near the ivory case of Tanagra statuettes.

" I know," he said, pushing towards me a pile of letters, reviews and books which he had just received, " I know that your nature is endowed with the bounteous richness of an exuberant land. You are a writer, too, and a writer needs knowledge more than anyone else. Tell me the name of a great writer whom both of us admire. Let us see what he would have become without knowledge."

" I am reminded of Racine, of whom you are about to write a book," I said.

" I am glad you have mentioned Racine as an example," he replied. " Recently I have given him much thought, indeed. Let us see how Racine would have written the story of Phèdre or Iphigénie if he had not known mythology so well, or if he had not been so familiar with the prosody of the ancients. Is not golden embroidery more beautiful on antique silk than it is on ordinary linen ? Is the work of a master of painting not worth its fitting frame ? Even the most valuable of

THE MASTER AT HIS DESK

precious stones needs a setting. The writer's art, nay, his talent, needs knowledge, without which it degénerates, crumbles to nothing. Racine made his knowledge of the classics serve his genius. I have always enjoyed this faculty of his in his verse, dramas and prose. I am in favour of the scholarly writer. You mention the king of poets, Verlaine. You are mistaken if you think he was not a scholar. His ' Poèmes Saturniens ' are evidence to the contrary. Jean Moréas said of him : ' The Muses and Minerva had filled Verlaine's glasses.' And Baudelaire ? He too, knew much. He was well versed in the classical forms of literature, and knew by heart most of Boileau's poems. He borrowed the forms of his verse from the great master of satire. If you read old Boileau attentively you will see what young Baudelaire learned of him. The majority of modern writers have no time, or their diseased nerves leave them no leisure to read. Pierre Loti said once when someone asked his opinion of an interesting book of great merit :

" ' I never read. I only write.'

" Writers used to smile at this statement, but

it made me realize how restless and tiresome the life of a modern author must be, who has no time to submerge his ego in past centuries. A writer should learn continually and absorb knowledge, so that he can transmit the world's wisdom to his contemporaries."

" Master," I asked him, " do men really want to learn, to comprehend ? "

He looked at me as if my remark had pained him, and then looked away over my head without answering. France was no longer with me—he was far away. From beneath my half-closed eyelashes I saw that he moved in his chair. From his high forehead he pushed his little red velvet cap to the top of his snow-white head and closed his turtle-rimmed spectacles, as always when he did not want to see.

" My answer could be witty and wicked and yet be right. But as I know how trustingly you listen to my words, my answer will be serious. I am myself one of those sceptics who believe. Is the greatest sceptic not the greatest believer ? He believes at least in his scepticism. But, however

doubting, one has to be devoted to truth. It would be difficult to say why, for there are so many reasons. Is it really true that men crave for knowledge and comprehension ? Generally speaking, I should not dare make so sweeping a statement. Yet beginning with Adam, who ate the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge, it always has been Man's yearning for knowledge which brought forth what we regard as our greatest values : the triumph of progress, of the arts and of love. Without knowledge we should live in caves, in never-ceasing terror of wild animals."

He stopped speaking and looked at the windows, through the coloured panes of which the sun's rays danced into the room, tickled the back muscles of an antique Greek statue, and sped through the room fronting on the garden, picking on invisible strings as they swept along. Music was swimming in the brilliant light, and from the garden below the odour of trees and flowers rose toward heaven. The air was pregnant with nature's perfume and the quietude of blissful repose.

France opened his tar-coloured suitcase, which

was ragged from much use. He kept his manuscripts, a novel, and his notes in this suitcase which he called his " indulgent friend." Before opening it he smoothed away the tattered marks of its age. On such occasions it seemed to me as if he were repeating what he once said : " We should keep our indulgent friends in high respect. Indulgence often gives us a new soul." He was perusing his notes with intense absorption, his face bathed in the sun. It seemed as if a smile were blossoming forth on his lips.

" One could believe to hear the nightingale and the Muses, nature and man," he said in a hushed tone. " This beautiful morning has a magic influence. It made me find something among my notes about which it would be good to write. There was a gardener in Montmorency, of whom I like to think because of his angelic nature, his goodness and intelligence. He played on his flute so wonderfully expressing the sentiments of love, fear, jealousy, worry, pain, bliss and hatred, that the birds of the park gathered around him, entranced. His flute was rustic and primitive ; made by his own

hands, yet he brought forth sounds on it which made the stars listen with strained attention. Every living soul in the vicinity hearkened to this sound, and people came from far away to hear it. The gardener's music cured sadness and ills. I experienced its good effects on more than one occasion. It soothed my nerves, enhanced my vitality and held my thoughts in the sphere of artistic beauty. I liked to call on the old gardener whenever I had leisure. It was good to sit in his whitewashed room, resting on the rough fir bench, in the midst of onions and odorous seeds. It was good to listen to his words, frank, intelligent and natural. Alas, I shall no more see him and cannot take you to him as I had promised . . . he died three days ago. He was an artist, his soul sublime, whose art grew like flowers on the meadows. He never had been to the Opera and I should not have dared to take him there. His comment would have been identical with what he had said about the glass-house flowers: 'Deprived of Nature's blessed vicissitudes, concealed from the Almighty's glance, they are the victims of my impatience.' Once I bought

roses from him, those purple roses which we had so long admired in my Roman vase, thanks to your secret of prolonging the life of cut flowers. On that occasion—I do not know whether I mentioned this incident to you before—I asked him :

" ' Why is every living creature so much touched by the sound of your flute ? '

" ' No doubt,' he answered ponderingly, ' because the feelings of man and beast, if frank and sincere, resemble each other. Animals do not understand my speech, but the sound of my sentiments is not strange to them.'

" The intelligent simplicity of my gardener friend was marvellous. He will be an angel on earth, in human shape, in this novel of mine, ' Les Anges,' which title I may change eventually. To perpetuate his memory I shall call him ' Nectaire.' Let us prepare the draft of the chapter devoted to him on this morning of bird songs and harmonies. It will be dedicated to him who is no more, and shall contain that which has remained of him in my memory."

Anatole France put his spectacles on the desk,

wiped his eyes, and leaned back in his chair. His face turned so pale and unnatural that a sudden fear seized me. " He has left me," I thought, " he is no longer, and *I* shall have to write now what there has remained of *him* in my memory." I felt relieved when, his voice trembling, he began to dictate :

" The first night of his incarnation Arcade slept at the Angel Istar's in a garret in that narrow, gloomy Rue Mazarin, which wallows along beneath the shadow of the old Institut de France.

" Don't you think," asked France raising his eyebrows, " that the sleepy Rue Mazarin is like a swamp ? "

He liked to ask questions which he answered himself. Questions were mostly a rhetorical confirmation of his own statements. While dictating he would sometimes tell me about extraneous things which, unconsciously, occupied his attention. This time, after having finished the chapter about the Angel, Arcade, he remarked :

" One of the angels ought to be a Hungarian, perhaps one of those rebels who want to improve

man's condition. It is a pity that I don't know sufficiently the conditions and character of the Hungarians. Tell me, how do people live in your Bude ? "

" Your Bude," meant Budapest, where France never had been, although many times he had expressed the wish to go there. Hungary was an eccentric country, he thought, and he was interested in eccentric places.

As he bent over his desk his profile was against a strong light, and his head stood out from the background of shelves like the statue of a Greek sage. From his forehead two vertical lines came down to his nose. Except for these there was hardly a wrinkle on his face, whose expression changed momentarily. His long moustache was in perfect harmony with his well-formed mouth around which there was always lurking a sarcastic smile concealing an agonizing pain. His eyes were brown, remarkably youthful and enthusiastic. They reflected goodness and seldom malice.

Old Josephine brought in the mail, placed it in front of me and went out on tiptoe. France took

ANATOLE FRANCE CORRECTING THE MANUSCRIPT OF "LA RÉVOLTE DES ANGES"

the manuscript from me while I opened the letters, which came from all over the world. A literary club in Brazil requested a copy of his lecture about Rabelais ; Russian revolutionists looked to him for counsel ; young poets sent him their verses ; scientists and politicians submitted to him their problems. Ferrer had just written from Madrid, and Hervé, before he had become an extreme reactionary, often turned to him for support when he got into trouble for his revolutionary views.

Brandes wrote that he would call on him shortly. They exchanged letters about new books and literary events. After many years of estrangement, France had again met Jules Lemaître, the dramatist, in whose spectacular conversion to Catholicism he was deeply interested.

" Lemaître is an honest man," he once said. " He is both a Catholic and an atheist. There are people for whom religion is a life necessity. France is still a Catholic country even if the monks have been expelled and the churches expropriated. I don't think we have more atheists now than we had before the separation of the Church from the

State. The working-men are freethinkers, no doubt, but we must not overestimate the amount of their freethinking."

Looking out of the window into the sunlit garden, he continued :

" We shall take a walk this afternoon and visit our old friends, the landmarks of Paris of yesteryear. We will cross the Passage de la Révolution and I will chaperon you to the Mint. We will ramble about many funny streets and will see the remnants of countless touching and amusing events."

France was born at Number 5, Quai Voltaire, and spent his childhood there. That large stone house is, in its simplicity, a resting-place for the eye, even if it is not a gem of contemporary architecture.

" My father's bookshop was there," he said, and old memories vibrated in his voice. " The owners have turned over the entire ground floor to a family with many children. The bookshops are moving to the boulevards and the busier thoroughfares. As a child I used to walk here with my grandmother, who was a very simple and very wise

woman. It was she more than anyone, except my mother, who took care of me. She used to tell me the most exquisite stories."

When talking about his childhood, France was usually moved. Old tales were haunting the old man whose knowledge of many centuries made him acquainted with much suffering and joy, the great depositaries of the human mystery.

II
RAMBLES IN PARIS

II

RAMBLES IN PARIS

AFTER having crossed the Étoile, the Place de la Concorde, and the Tuileries, we alighted from the coach before the Pont Neuf. We started to walk to the left bank through the oldest and longest bridge in Paris. We walked slowly, looking at the Seine, whose waters were angrily foaming among the slender bridge pillars and arches. The fresh green of the " Vert Galant " near the centre of the Pont Neuf was like a beautiful smaragd stone in a gold setting.

" Once upon a time," France began to relate, " once upon a time, toward the end of the reign of Henri IV, charming little mansions saw their reflections in the Seine, washing the flanks of the Vert Galant. Old prints attest that in those days, instead of our steam and motor boats, sailing barges and clumsy rafts were floating down the river, that many coloured stream which I have never ceased to admire. In the tiny houses, nestling in the shadow of the trees, loving couples met each other in ardent

embrace. Charming Vert Galant, hugged by the two arms of the Seine, has always been the favourite rendezvous of lovers, especially when in the grass, reaching to one's waist, shepherds made love to the maidens washing their clothes in the river. Even now, on mild evenings, one can see scores of lovely midinettes in the arms of clerks of the warehouses. Life is after all a repetition of repetitions."

We stopped in the centre of the bridge, in front of the equestrian statue of Henri IV, which faces Place Dauphine. On the square two corner houses jutted out and were so closely built that the narrow passage between them was like the neck of a bottle. The two houses were covered with scaffoldings on which masons stood removing the coat of mortar on the buildings with their hammers. Through the dust we could see the red brick wall of the time of Louis XIII, slowly growing as the mortar disappeared.

" I am glad that that ugly mortar plastering will be removed," exclaimed France. " We will see now the real faces of the houses of Madame Roland, the great patroness of the Girondists, and of that old

quack, M. Thieul, as they appeared on old engravings. Those two houses are so near that they are bending over each other ! I can almost see the face of Madame Roland as she appeared in her window and asked Thieul to give her herbs to preserve her youthful beauty. Little did she surmise that her charms were ripening for the axe of the executioner. Just as these two houses were alike, so were all the buildings of the square."

From the Quai des Orfèvres, two young men came towards us. They were students of the Sorbonne, one the president and the other the secretary of the " Students' House." They reminded France that the house-warming of their club would be held next week and that he had promised to make the opening address. France confirmed his promise and said that, although he was exploring the mysteries of the past, he liked to look into the future and its Utopian possibilities.

" And the present ? " asked the president.

" It is being built on the foundation of the wisdom of the past and is destined for the use of the future."

After the two young men had gone on their way France commented :

" I like the past better than many people think I do. The other day a young and gifted author declared that Stendhal and Balzac were old-fashioned. I do not quite understand the word, in that sense, though I have tried many times to fathom its exact meaning. It conveys the idea, I think, of something that is antiquated, of no use. A necktie which the dandy throws away is old-fashioned. Are Stendhal and Balzac like a threadbare necktie ? Should the thought of the human mind, the product of one's life force, really be doomed, thus wasted ? In the great universe where not an atom is lost, nor a tiny portion of the world's energy is squandered, should it be only the creation of the human brain which is wantonly spent ? Youth is so proud of its power that it wants to rid itself of the creations of the masters and try new paths which never have been trodden before. They are thinking ahead many centuries and the most modern is not modern enough for them. Happy is youth, the great believer in miracles, the beneficiary

of life's regenerative forces. They want to destroy so that they can build ; they want to annihilate so that they can begin. They want to have a new Bible, Life's new Bible, written in a new language. Do they forget the atavism of our blood ? Don't they realize that they will have to continue the subconscious life of their fathers whom they want to bury alive ? How can they get away from the eternal continuity of things ? Or, perhaps, that whose existence we deny has no existence at all ? When thinking about youth I am full of questions and yearnings. If I could be young again . . . If I could turn back from the grave and believe in fantasies and chase the impossible until it becomes a reality. I have become as stale and old-fashioned as the iconoclasts will become in the eyes of their more progressive children."

As we were on our way to the Mint, the books lured him. Monsieur Pierre, a white-bearded dealer in old books, noticing us, slowly limped to us in his large linen slippers. From a secret drawer, he carefully took out a book.

"I have been holding this old Racine, Master, for

a month and a half," he said, handing to him an attractively bound small volume. " I knew you would come."

France bought the Racine, a Corneille, and a Voltaire, the last two because they were damaged. He would restore them with great patience and when they would be in good order he would give them to someone who liked books. He himself had two editions of most of the books of the old masters.

Our hands and pockets were full of books when we took leave of M. Pierre and went over to the Mint.

" My grandmother had often brought me here," he said as we stopped in front of the main entrance. " I was very small then and I had to bend my head far back if I wanted to see a nest near the cornice to which grandmother had called my attention. I don't know why, but it is certain that the nest was a revelation for me. I did not comprehend the beauty of the building, the dignity of its columns, and the pleasing proportions of every detail. Yet, perhaps on account of the nest, I liked to come here. Standing before its gate I

enjoyed the frisky sunshine on the roof of the Louvre, the Seine with its steamers, and the inexhaustible variety of the second-hand book shops.

He was still talking about his childhood when we turned into narrow cobblestone lanes where his tiny feet, as a child, had often trodden. Every now and then we stopped in front of a well-shaped gate or window, a queer balcony, an artistic railing or statuette. Everything beautiful attracted his eyes as if it had a magnetic force. It was inspiring to go rambling with him, without aim, forgetful of everything except Beauty. It was a spring afternoon, the sky overcast and the air a bit heavy.

We entered through the gate of what France called the " Passage de la Révolution," famous for revolutionary memories. Little servant-maids were singing at the top of their voices to the tunes of a street organ. From the windows, clothes-lines were stretched above the yard, on which tattered laundry was dangling. Everything was disorderly in this passage which once belonged to princes of royal blood. In one corner there were barrels, staves and hoops, empty bottles and broken pots

scattered all over the ground. In another corner there was a pile of shattered frames, smoky stove-pipes, rusty dishes and other household paraphernalia. Near by was the shop of a frame-maker, a joiner and a shoe-maker. In front of the joiner's shop two dirty little boys were rolling in the shavings of resinous pine planks and a tiny dog, black and dishevelled, was jumping around them. A chubby-faced apprentice with a downcast air stood in the door of the shoe-maker's shop, a pot of paste in his greasy hands. His wistful look clearly showed that he would rather do anything else than stir the paste.

"This is a queer nook of post-Revolutionary Paris," commented France smilingly. "Look at the windows above the inn. It is not their noble lines that prompt me to show them to you. I merely wish to remind you that on a stormy night Robespierre was sleeping, if anyone could sleep on such a night, behind those windows. I wonder what thoughts the tense atmosphere of those fateful days brought to him. He had fled to this hotel a few days before his execution. The hotel has not

changed since then except that it has become more decayed."

The frame-maker emerged from his shop, a small skull-cap on the top of his head, and a faded green apron reaching to his ankles. He greeted France cordially.

"We are going to Prouté," France informed him.

"It means business for me," answered the frame-maker, scratching the glue from his fingers. "My friend, the joiner, will be glad to hear this, too."

"Has the flood of the Siene done any damage to you?" asked France.

"Practically nothing. We are higher than the level of the Rue de la Seine. Besides, water wouldn't damage our bric-à-brac. But it destroyed Prouté's prints and etchings. All we got out of the flood was a little scare."

"Prouté has lost over sixty thousand francs, almost his whole fortune," replied France, "and what is even more, the work of a lifetime. The greatest part of his reproductions has been lost. Many of those which he saved are full of sand and

dirty beyond recognition. I'm going to buy half of these from him. Some of my fellow academicians will buy the other half."

" Çà ira ! Çà ira ! "—a screeching exclamation interrupted the Master.

" Mme. Noémie's parrot," said the frame-maker. " Mme. Noémie is a rheumatic old seamstress, so old that one would think she had been here since the Revolution."

By the time we reached Rue Dauphine it was raining. Nevertheless, we stopped in front of the " Rotisserie de la Reine Pédauque " to watch the poultry roasting on the grill, its odour mingling with that of the spring rain.

" Look out," warned France jokingly, " the salamander might run out of the glowing coal."

" Yes," I answered, glancing toward a tall person in a mackintosh, " but first this Abbé Coignard has to enter the cook-shop."

When the abbé-looking person did enter the shop we giggled like two naughty children.

We found Mme. Prouté quite alone in the midst of the mouldy prints. She was sitting at the

desk, tired and pale, leaning on her elbows and looking fixedly at the malodorous heap of pulp. The rainy weather and the gloom of the approaching evening helped to make the shop a very sad sight indeed.

France shook his head disapprovingly.

"One must never be so sad, Madame," he said. "Do not let your grief overpower your natural optimism. I have always found you brave. You must keep up your courage."

It was dark. A gas-lamp was lit in front of the shop. Its yellow light flooded the pulp, which reminded one of a funeral pyre. M. Prouté arrived and after preliminary courtesies produced the drawings, prints and etchings which were salvaged from the deluge. Some of them were in perfect condition, others only slightly damaged. France examined them intently. Whenever he saw a drawing in good condition his eyes lit up.

"Marvellous, beautiful!" he exclaimed enthusiastically. "These Italian drawings have not been damaged at all. The tiny stains on the edges do not count. A good fairy must have saved these

two drawings of Michel Angelo, which breathe power and indomitable energy. These nudes must have been made when he was a youth. You may put them aside for me." How great was he even in details ! Naturally, in order to create lasting works one has to be familiar with the details.

" Here is an unknown master, probably from pre-Renaissance Italy, whose drawings you must have bought in London. It is only the English who can appreciate old and exquisite drawings. If you had bought them in Italy they would have been corrected many times over, as my Raphaels are. The Madonna of this Italian artist is like Perugino's Sibylla, mysterious, naughty, even coquettish. I would like to have it. I will try to find out what the artist's name was.

" These saints," pointing to a group of drawings, " have neither faith nor devotion. They have been made by second-rate artists during the decadence of the Renaissance. Yet, you will sell them at a better price than the works of great artists because they are closer to the average taste. I just realize that I am teaching my teacher. After all, it is from

you and your friends that I have learned what the public wants. I have often listened to the comments of our art collectors and was amazed indeed to see how their taste was influenced by the aberrations of fashion."

The contents of many drawers were in the meantime exposed to the blinking yellow light. France selected three engravings by Marcantonio Raimondi, the famous Bolognese engraver. His selections were the third, fifth, and seventh pieces of the series, " The Life of the Virgin," one of which he offered to me :

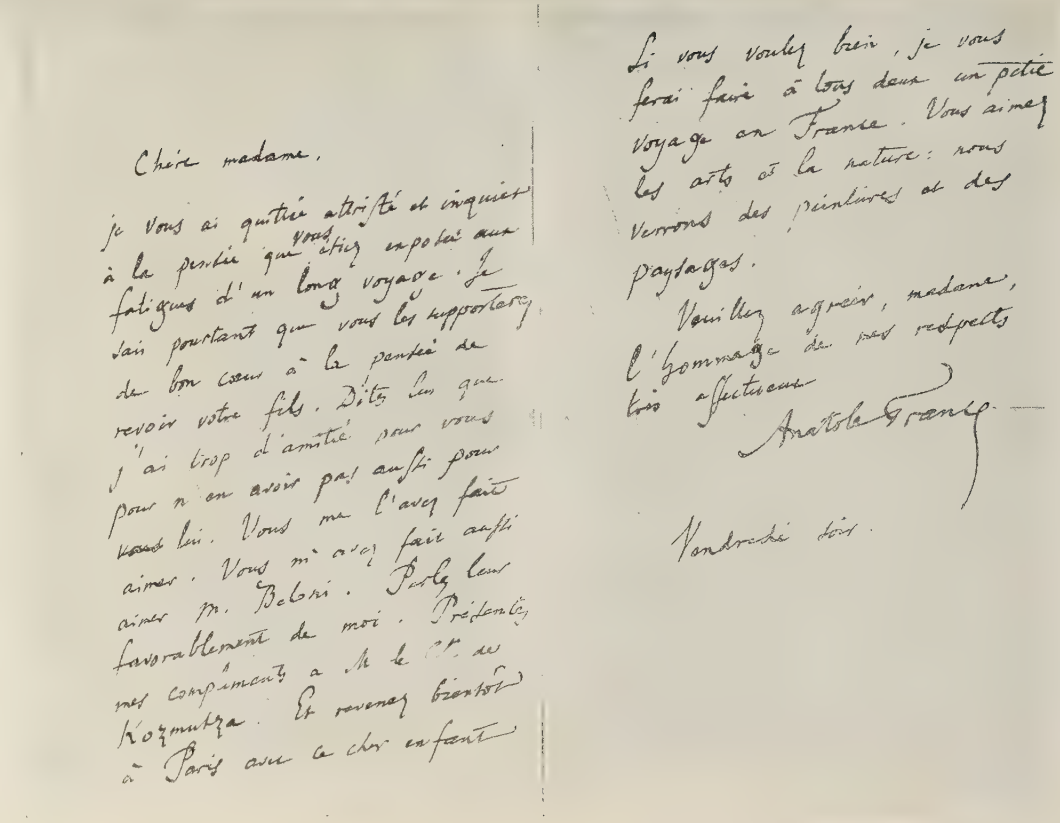
" As a token of our rambles," he said. " Please do not hestitate to accept it. My collection will be complete without it. I needed only the third and fifth pieces. I have the seventh piece, ' L'Annonciation,' in two copies because Dürer made several copies of this great composition. Yes, it was Dürer and not Marcantonio, the etcher, who made the series, as art critics had assumed originally. This belief was due to the fact that Marcantonio, who with his perfect artistry and taste, recreated and softened the rigid lines of the German master, was so

carried away by his enthusiasm that he thought the series was his and stamped on it not only the mark of his individuality but his signature as well. I have no doubt that he acted in good faith. However it may be, this mistake does not detract anything from Marcantonio's art. He was a great artist.

" This is an etching of your Rembrandt, the ' good cook,' " he said in a jesting mood, showing me a picture. Bending over it, I remarked :

" It is ' Jesus Blessing the Fish and Bread.' But why, Master, do you call him the good cook ? "

" Because I like his art and not because I lack respect for him. He is a magician, almost omniscient. Everything he tries his brush on becomes a part of himself. He recreates not only the life and soul of his models but their exterior as well. He recreates the texture of their bones, their skin, muscles and veins. He infuses into their blood a mysterious fluid which makes the flaring up and calming down of their temperaments like the brewing and abating of storms. The portraits of Rembrandt's old men are more than biographies ; they are the history of their epoch, nay, the history



Chère madame,

je vous ai quittée attristé et inquiet à la pensée que vous étiez exposée aux fatigues d'un long voyage. Je sais pourtant que vous les supporterez de bon cœur à la pensée de revoir votre fils. Dites lui que j'ai trop d'amitié pour vous pour n'en avoir pas aussi pour lui. Vous me l'avez fait aimer. Vous m'avez fait aussi aimer M. Bebri. Parlez leur favorablement de moi. Présentez mes compliments à M le Cte de Kozmutza. Et revenez bientôt à Paris avec le cher enfant

Si vous voulez bien, je vous ferai faire à tous deux un petit voyage en France. Vous aimez les arts et la nature: nous verrons des peintures et des paysages.

Veuillez agréer, madame, l'hommage de mes respects très affectueux

Anatole France

Vendredi soir.

LETTER FROM FRANCE TO MME. BÖLÖNI OFFERING TO TAKE HER AND HER HUSBAND ON A TRIP THROUGH FRANCE

of humanity. He condenses in his pictures the history of evolution from the primitive semi-savage to the sophisticated philosopher of his age. I hear his pictures say: 'This is how I have become what I am.' I call him the good cook because he made palatable food out of the raw material of human experience. And I call him ' your Rembrandt ' because he was my Rembrandt when I could not afford to have adequate reproductions of his masterpieces, the same as you have nothing from him except the inspiration for your burning enthusiasm and love of his art."

France then told us the story of his Rembrandt collection. As a young man he cut from the *Gartenlaube*, a German family magazine, one of the portraits of Saskia van Uylenborch, the wife of the artist. Later on, as work and worry told on his time and nerves, he carelessly put the reproduction in a drawer. He found it only after many years when he had the means to spend for art. Then he felt something akin to shame for having neglected the Dutch master, his first love. For several decades afterwards he spent much time, money

and effort to obtain at least one copy of every Rembrandt etching.

"I have this etching, too," said France. "A trustee of the British Museum once wanted to get it from me."

"*Tout le monde est fermé!*" It was the policeman who said this, entering the shop, his boots and mackintosh dripping with water. "I thought something was the matter with you that you kept open so late. That is why I dropped in," he said.

Joking about our absent-mindedness in forgetting about dinner and closing time, we started toward the Seine, on which the lights of coloured ship lamps were playing hide and seek. It was drizzling and the air was pregnant with the odour of the Parisian spring.

III
PLACE DAUPHINE

III

PLACE DAUPHINE

THE following day I was just about to leave my house to do some shopping when a cab stopped in front of my door and France alighted with a package in his hand.

"I gave you leave for to-day as I wanted to surprise you," he said. I asked him to come upstairs and wait until I bought the food for lunch, after which I could go with him to the Museum or we could continue his book, just as he wished.

I opened the door of my rooms, which were filled with the glory of the morning sun and the odour of the roses. Almost beneath the balcony the Seine was glittering.

"What a refreshing spectacle," said France, leaning the package against the wall. Then he stepped towards the door leading to the balcony.

"How beautiful the Seine is, smiling through the trees. It is like a sparkling eye shadowed by long lashes. Except for this charming corner, there

are no trees along the quay of the island. This beautiful Place Dauphine is my favourite in old Paris. I have always wished that some good acquaintance of mine were living here, and when my wish was not gratified I brought my Evariste Gamelin and old Brotteaux for company. The vicinity of the Louvre and Notre Dame inspire me and I would like to write my speech for the inauguration of the ' Students' House ' here to-day."

I placed a glass of milk and a piece of Vienna bread on the desk for my guest, and went to buy food for a " proletarian " lunch, as France liked to call it. The menu which he selected consisted of chicken broth, water-cress salad, cheese and strawberries. He liked simplicity in food as well as everything else. He delighted in describing the things he liked as magnificently simple, and it has seemed to me very often that he was the creator of that grandiose simplicity in literature which has captivated the world. His entire nature radiated simplicity which was in harmony with his wisdom and immense knowledge.

When I returned, I found France with a hammer

SÁNDOR KÉMERI (MME. GEORGES BÖLÖNI)

and a screw-driver in his hand, driving nails in the wall.

" This is the last one," he said smilingly. " I wanted to be ready when you came home and I hurried up the job."

I was so surprised that I found no words for a few moments. My favourite pictures were hanging on the walls. Above my book-shelves I saw Rembrandt's etching, " Jesus Blessing the Fish and Bread " ; above my desk was a piece of Marcantonio's " Life of the Virgin " ; above the sofa hung a masterly facsimile of Proudhomme's " Belle Marguerite " ; in a corner a Renaissance bas-relief and etchings representing the picturesque Posilipo district in Naples and the Piazza Navona in Rome. Beside my cupboard my eyes were attracted by a panel of Pisanello, glorifying Isotta degli Atti, the lover and later the wife of Sigismondo, the tyrant of Rimini. Alongside the panel I noticed a bas-relief of a small bronze lion, executed by Barye, the greatest artist of animal life of the French school.

" I removed the cover from your mantelpiece," said France, " and I am certain you will excuse me

for it. The mantelpiece is the only architectural ornament in the room, and it would be a pity to hide it underneath a heavily laced cover. Even if it is not quite artistic, its dignified appearance gives a certain character to the room. As to your furniture, I must admit that I could not have placed it better. You know that I cannot bear lack of taste in places where I am a frequent visitor. By appealing to their vanity I have induced many people of my acquaintance to re-arrange their furniture and remove some superfluous ornaments. I would like to see more architecture in our apartments and to have more columns and cupolas to express the eternal roundness of things. I dislike gaudy decorations."

He spoke softly without looking at me. He spoke mainly to guard off my words of thanks. Once when somebody thanked him he exclaimed petulantly: "I feel very keenly the reproach in thanks." I reminded him of this.

"I am aware of the profound truth of your words, Master, and I know that even words of deepest gratitude express a certain amount of envy."

I was intentionally rude so that he should not see my emotions. But I could not mislead him.

" You do not need to be so moved," he said. " By giving pleasure to others we are acting selfishly. We get repaid with compound interest for whatever we give. Let us now discard this subject. May I have a few sheets of paper? "

" I will take your dictation until my *pot-au-feu* is ready," I volunteered.

In the silence of the morning hours I filled many foolscaps with France's words. The leaves of the poplar trees near my window did not stir. No trucks were crossing on the Pont Neuf and only seldom did a motor-car speed by. Small tooting steamers were sailing in the Seine, the water displaced by them beating against the ramparts. From the other side of the water one could hear faintly the humming noise of the crowd. Its sound was like the rhythmical murmur of the waves running on a bank of sand.

" Charming Place Dauphine is really an ' Isle of Silence,' " remarked France when I got up to look after the meal. " I smell vegetables and

marrow-bone. . . . I feel the scent of some spice or grass, but I do not know what it is."

"They call it thyme and it is much used by the Hungarians of Transylvania. I put a tiny bit of it in the soup. I hope you will like it."

"I like parsley, marjoram and parsnip," said France, "which are well known in France. I am quite certain that I will like thyme. I like every odorous herb. I particularly like ferreous herbs, which, an old physician friend of mine told me, have a good effect on the eye nerves. Most of those which we use to-day have been known since history began. Ancient Greeks and Romans used spice to make the beef tastier. Homer himself enhanced his joy in life by picking wild herbs in his rambles across the fields and by spicing his meat, which he roasted at the house altar in the centre of his hut. The smoke, rising like a column, blackened the beams and the half oxen which the elders of Cyme and the admirers of the great singer sent to him, who knew more songs than the Mages of Cyme had oxen and goats. And a wise man Homer was. He did not leave the preparation of his meals to women or

children, but followed the example of kings who cooked their own meals."

"Life must have been gloriously simple in Homer's time."

"Father Zeus divided the fruits of the earth in a very unequal way. Although the rich often gave the Bard of Cyme half of an ox, yet, his bronze fork frequently lay in the grey ash on which no fat had dropped from juicy meat. The singer of Cyme was often hungry at nights when he took his lyre and wandered on the seashore watching the silver flowers of the moon on the dark waters of the sea. He was distressed to see that even flowers and animals had disturbing shadows which robbed the night of its peaceful monotony. Thus, his nightly wanderings were not soothing to the nerves nor refreshing to the body. The more I think of Homer the more I realize that he, too, must have felt that everything is against us . . . *oui*, . . . *tout est contre nous*."

Suddenly the crying of a baby was heard from below the balcony.

"How much suffering is pent up in so little a

body," exclaimed France. "What is the matter with the baby, I wonder?"

"He is the child of an oculist and is teething. His cradle is at the side of his mother's bed, just below my bedroom, and he keeps me awake whole nights with his pitiful crying."

"Nature is as cruel to that little creature as any stupid bad man would be," said France sadly. "Alas, man was made in Nature's image. The bloodhounds of the Holy Inquisition simply imitated what Nature is doing unto us, torturing, killing. . . ."

He sat down. His white-bearded head fell on his chest. He leaned his forehead on his hand without, however, covering it entirely. His gloomy thoughts gave him an altogether different air. Below his eyebrows, his lids were quivering. After an oppressive silence of a few moments he spoke:

"Where did we leave off our work? . . . Oh, yes . . . I would like to acquaint youth with my ideas about war. Let us try:

"War in our days is but a hereditary disease, a reversion to the unmorality of the fratricidal savage.

The simpler and clearer the aim of warfare, the more despicable and disgusting it is. People are going to war against foreign nations without knowing why. We are worse than the wild beasts, which do no harm to one another without cause.

" Militarism is the worst pest of contemporary society. Men go to war to plunder and to murder because they are thievish, adulterous, and destructive. They are addicted to their own glorification and not that of a cause. They go to war because with the display of their strength and their cruelty they try to impress the women. The cocks woo the hens by killing one another."

Leaning over my desk, I was writing very fast, ploughing the lines as France's words fell. I seldom stole a look at him, so anxious was I not to disturb him in the expression of what both of us thought was right. He was sitting in the centre of the room, at a round table, on which there was a bouquet of lilacs in a slender vase. His head behind the overshadowing flowers was like the autumn sun half covered by clouds. I had been writing for a very long time without any interruption. The

silence was oppressive. It was a typically warm Parisian noon.

France could use his weak voice with great artistry, yet, differently from that of reputed orators. He usually began talking very softly, as if beseeching the audience to pay attention, then gradually raising his voice as he talked. There was a metallic resonance in it which would strike upon the ear. This is perhaps the explanation why, with his clear logic and the commanding delivery of his words, he always has succeeded in making his audience assimilate his thoughts and sentiments.

Large greenish flies hummed their monotonous song around the window. Through the glass partition of the kitchenette one heard the sound of the boiling *pot-au-feu*, beating the rhythm to the ticking of the clock. The humming, the boiling, the ticking, and the deep-sounding words of France swelled to a symphony in the languid atmosphere of the mid-day. I did not know whether I had been writing for a moment, an hour, or all eternity.

" Thank you, we have finished," said France, and on his tired, whitened face a smile hovered as he

noticed that my fingers were still holding fast the pen, ready to continue the race. " We will now be school children on a vacation, enjoying their freedom after the long year of study. I hope we will have a good appetite. Our soup must have become very strong in the meantime."

I laid the table-cloth and France prepared the salad. Although he had a good appetite he did not eat much. He was moderate in eating, not by self-imposed constraint or habit, but by nature. Moderation was a matter of taste with him. We ate strawberries with sugar.

" Its colour is like a purple robe ! " exclaimed France. " It exhales the warmth of the sun and the odour of the earth. It contains iron enough to keep one in life without other food . . . if we could add wild honey and locusts to our menu, as did Saint John in the wilderness. It would not be bad to be alone like Saint John was . . . at least for a short time. We would become quite introspective and would lose our receptivity to the formalities and conventions of life. We would understand the saying of the saint : ' Mine is not the sensuality of those who

wash and bathe. I wash in my tears and bathe in my sweat.' Since, however, we do not live in the glorious solitude of the desert, but in the capital of Europe, Paris, we see a different life and have to indulge in the enjoyment of things which make our lives more complicated without making them more profound."

I placed some cream on his table.

" I almost forgot about the cream. Don't you like it on your strawberries ? "

" Thank you, strawberries are best with powdered sugar. But no. How careless of me to make such a statement. I must not forget that others may have different opinions. Our friend, Pierre Mille, eats strawberries with ' just a little pepper to make it tastier.' Although in this respect, as in many others, I differ from Pierre Mille, I am very fond of him. I like his head, which is a pet breeding-place of the French esprit. He sees things in a serious manner because he looks at them from the angle of a joke. He is a Democritus although he could be a Heraclitus. He is a very gifted man,

honest and reliable. I like him and his sculptor wife, the charming Yvonne Serruys."

A soft breeze caressed for a moment the silvery green leaves of the poplars. It heralded the abating of the heat. A song, coming evidently from a moist throat, penetrated to us from the quay:

" Dans un nuage bigarré
Il se couche cette soirée.
Hélas, la lune a perdu,
Perdu sa virginité. . . ."

I stepped to the window to see the singer of this extraordinary song. He looked rather " down and out," although he did not appear to be a workman. He wore tuxedo trousers, a blue workman's blouse, a shattered high hat, and patent leather shoes. It was not his queer garment which made me think that he was a " gentleman." It was his face, storm-beaten, yet, finely chiselled, which gave him the air of distinction. He was leaning against one of the poplars repeating the refrain of the naughty song.

" Do look at that queer man," I urged France. " One seldom sees such a distinguished-looking scarecrow."

" I do not want to see him and please don't tell me how he looks," pleaded France, covering his eyes with his hand. " I do not want to know when the policeman takes him away. . . . I'd like to believe that he is Tabarin resurrected, the former song-king of the Pont Neuf, and of the Place Dauphine, the sardonic street bard of naughty truths. I want to see him in the reflection of my closed eyes, and to see how life was surging in his days, when, historians tell us, his strong baritone silenced every other singer with admiring jealousy. With the men of those days vanished Tabarin. Yet, I feel as if Tabarin's song would rise to me from the Seine and as if it would re-echo on the old stones. From the past emerges the time when their whims brought here velvet-shoed ladies in silk-cushioned coaches, princesses in crinolines, marquises and other distinguished folk. They were accompanied by gallant chevaliers in lace shirts and buckle shoes. They made merry or listened to Tabarin's songs, in which he often extemporized about his audience. When he would finish, gold pieces would fall into the hat of the great singer, and a couple of pretty

flower-venders would come and offer for sale their odorous merchandise. The grand-seigneur would buy a bouquet and would place it on the bosom of milady. Those seigneurs and their ladies lived as if life were a ballroom, full of music, song, and laughter. Great thoughts did not burden their uncultivated brains."

France was interrupted by screaming, which came from upstairs. As many times before, it was the janitor's apprentice, who was being beaten by the fishmonger.

" This incredible human cruelty ! " complained France, awakened from his dream. " Will our life never be harmonious ? Must we have always to take refuge in Utopias to escape from despair ? Man has always spoiled the game. Neither the lazy days of the grand-seigneurs, nor the rough and sweating existence of to-day, is that which I hope posterity will enjoy. I like the past because it was picturesque and because we like most of the things that belong to the past. Yet, I do not close my eyes to its horrible memories and I readily admit that it was not a bit better than our much-scolded present.

Do you know that Place Dauphine played a horrid role during the Inquisition? Right here, where now stands the equestrian statue of Henri IV, two men were burned at the command of Philip the Fair, Prince of Austria and King of France, whom the monk Bernard Saisset described as the most handsome man in the world. Jacques de Molay and the Norman Guy were put to death at the stake because they professed to believe in heretical doctrines to which the pious sovereign took exception. Are we heading towards better times or will man's folly and wickedness always spoil life, which in itself is so beautiful?"

IV
THE ABBÉ

IV

THE ABBÉ

ON a Sunday of the early spring we were invited to lunch at the home of a lawyer, the oldest and best friend of Anatole France, who lived in the Rue de Monsieur le Prince. There were fine old bas-reliefs above the gate of his house, the creations of Rouen masters.

We were looking at the ex-libris and the pages of yellowed books, when, unexpectedly, the brother of our host, an abbé, arrived with a small and rather untidy-looking bag in his hand.

" I have not seen you since you were a student of theology," said France, holding out his hand for greeting.

" It is more than thirty years."

At the table the abbé sat between me and his brother, opposite France, who occupied a place between our hostess and her sister. Before taking his seat the abbé made the sign of the cross. We talked little while at our soup. There was a

general feeling of uneasiness in the company of a man who came from the French countryside and, evidently, brought with him the phraseology, prejudices and ideas of the French peasant. The conversation became more lively, however, when between the courses we treated ourselves to the good Burgundy wine. France drank his mineral water.

The two brothers, of whom the lawyer was the elder, were teasing each other about their different philosophies of life. Gradually, however, these teasings degenerated into insults as they took up religion and the arts. The abbé commented on a recent book of Remy de Gourmont with so much malice and found so much fault not only with the work but also with its author, the erstwhile monk, that France had to intervene to temper the discussion.

" An author such as he ought to be jailed and his writings burnt by the hangman," insisted the abbé angrily. " He should not be allowed to poison the mind of the youth of France. If we had a religious administration such things could not happen. These writers make France a country of atheists. They are driving people into the arms of the devil."

"You cannot be so narrow-minded as to believe what you have just said," replied his brother. "You are merely intrigued by an unjustified fanaticism. If you did believe in this, then——"

The two brothers measured each other with intolerant eyes. France had to interpose again:

"I can still visualize your father's house, the large garden, the poultry yard, the oxen and the barn. I can still see your mother, as she brought you the cake. You started from the same place, . . . from the same apple tree. How could you get so far apart? You, two brothers who have been brought up together."

In the sudden silence which ensued I looked at the two brothers. The priest was taller than the average, stooped, flat-chested, and weak. His cheeks were lean and his forehead furrowed with wrinkles. His grey, inquisitive eyes expressed distrust; his Roman nose was brought into sharp relief on the background of his angular profile and crooked chin. His hard-set narrow lips seldom opened for a smile, as if the deep lines around the corners of his mouth had cut it off from all earthly

joy. His ears stood apart and his hair was grey. His large head was set with obstinate determination on a strong neck. His face was parchment-like, as if steeped in sorrow, and gave him the impression of an ascetic.

On the other hand, the lawyer was short, broad-shouldered and strong. His round and rather fat face was the picture of health. There was only one long line in the middle of his glossy forehead. His dark eyes were joyous and his expression benevolent. His nose was not well shaped, vanishing in the roundness of his face. His large fleshy mouth was mobile, either smiling or laughing. His grey hair looked whiter in the proximity of his rosy skin. He looked open-minded, honest, and intelligent.

France noticed my silent contemplation.

"The older one resembles his father and the younger takes after his mother."

We had coffee in the cheerful empire salon of the hostess. There was a row of rum and cognac bottles on the table. The abbé asked for a glass of Chartreuse. France smiled almost imperceptibly when he asked :

" If I wanted to be malicious I should ask you now, why do so many members of the clergy drink this green poison ? It befogs the brain and affects the nervous system more unfavourably than any venomous book. I could point out a number of disadvantages of drinking Chartreuse if I let my imagination run away with me, but I am not going to do it. I understand that this liquor is an important source of revenue for the monks, and if one drinks it with moderation it is not detrimental to health but helps digestion. It may help people in distress to forget about their worries, at least temporarily. Yes, Monsieur l'Abbé, every coin has two sides. I look at both sides of the coin with great interest. While doing so I usually forget that I have to pass a judgment and enjoy what I see."

The abbé took a narcissus from a slender vase and smelt it. He nodded, but did not answer.

The hostess showed France a collection of reproductions.

" My husband has bought me this album of nudes in French art."

Glancing through the album we asked France's opinion about several pictures.

" Ingres ? " he said. " His drawings are valuable, but his exaggerated accurateness makes them rigid. His colours are unbearable. The ' Belle Marguerite ' of Proudhomme ? I admit that I am prejudiced in its favour. You have every reason," he turned to me saying this, " to accuse me of being partial to my favourite French painter. Manet's ' Olympia ' ! Is it not in the distinguished company of Watteau and Velasquez ? "

As if bitten by a snake, the abbé jumped to his feet from the arm-chair in the niche of the window. We had thought that while we were talking in undertones, he had fallen asleep, with his breviary in his hand. He slapped his brother on the shoulder with rekindled wrath.

" You gave these pictures to your own wife? The notorious ' Olympia,' that pornographic dirt. It is not enough that the authorities of the republic have stained the walls of the Louvre with it. Are now its ugly lines to disfigure the homes of our Catholic families ? I will announce from the pulpit

after my return home that whoever tolerates this naked horror in his house will be excommunicated from the Holy Church. I will save my flock from the contagion of the pest."

He talked as if he had been shaken by fever. The whole company regarded him compassionately. No one was angry with him, not even his brother. France pushed a chair to him.

" Do sit down, Monsieur l'Abbé. We do not wish to attack you, nor your religious belief. We respect the convictions of others. It is not vulgar nudity we are praising but the beauty of the human form as seen by great artists. Why should the artist not present to us the form of the human being as God has made it ? Adam and Eve were naked before God."

" Later, however, the Almighty found it necessary to have their bodies covered with the skin of animals," continued the abbé, still indignantly. " From the artistic point of view there is no need of nakedness. Why did Manet not paint a Madonna if he were so great an artist ? Why did he paint this atrocity ? "

" It was only after their fall that Adam and Eve covered their bodies," went on France. " Being ashamed of one's body is, therefore, the consequence of sin. If Manet had painted a Madonna, it would have been like Lakmé, the Madonna of the Hindoos—naked, slender, shapely."

" Heathenish, in a word," said the abbé. " Then I despise art and will weed it out of my garden."

France never for a moment lost his patience. He treated the abbé as if he were in need of conversion. He was meek and humble like a prophet and bore without grumble the insults and personalities of the priest. When taking leave the abbé said to him :

" I will pay you a visit sometime and try to convert you. You are not obstinate, merely sceptical. It would be a pity to let so splendid a brain perish in the swamp of incredulity."

" I will be glad to see you for luncheon tomorrow," answered France. " As to converting me to your faith, I am entirely at your disposal."

Our host accompanied us to the gate. On parting, he embraced France.

" You are what you have always been, wise and good. I thank you for having taken my brother under your protection. He makes me despair."

The following day I called on France an hour before the usual time. He sat at his table in his night-gown. He drank coffee and was discussing with the housekeeper the luncheon menu. We rather hurriedly glanced through the letters, reviews and papers. Then we looked over the new books and France dictated to me the last three pages of the fifteenth chapter of the " Revolt of the Angels." The noon bell finally began to ring.

" The abbé will be here at one o'clock to convert me," he remarked, and looked around his studio. " There are a few things we have to bring in order."

He went to an antique Greek torso, the pride of his collection, and with tender fingers caressed its marble.

" I will cover it with a curtain so as not to offend the abbé's eyes, unaccustomed as he is to eternal beauty. I do not want to insult his principles, so distorted by his lack of vision and by obstinacy.

He clings to darkness as we cling to light. While we are calm in the clearness of our vision, he is impatient with every little ray of light that may fall on his retina. One has to be careful in making him accustomed to light. It would pain his eyes."

Speaking in the voice of one who is worried about a near relative's health, he removed from the wall a Titian and a Correggio, and hid a beautiful Greek statue in a drawer of his desk. He did not touch the Tanagras, but he slipped into a drawer the Voltaire volumes whose place was on his desk. From behind the gobelin drapery of the door he looked back at his studio, as if apologizing, before he went down to the ground floor. On the stairs he pondered for a moment before the naked Muse on the tomb of a Greek poet. I told him we would take the abbé between us, when going upstairs, so that the Muse would not offend his eyes. There was no nudity in the dining-room, built in Old-German style, except the bodies of two giants holding the marble slab of the fireplace, and the body of Jesus convulsed with pain on his black cross. It was the work of an artist of Rembrandt's

FRANCE IN HIS LIBRARY AT THE VILLA SAÏD

time. These nudes did not worry France for he surmised that the nudity of the male did not offend the abbé. There would have been much to do in the salon, but scarcely had we begun to make things disappear when the abbé was announced. We took him directly to the dining-room, after France had hung his crooked stick beside his overcoat.

" It is a cornel tree," said the abbé. " It came from my first parish, and it has served me for a quarter of a century. It would deserve to have its anniversary celebrated."

" Cornel tree," France whispered to me as we were going towards the dining-room, " the abbé does not know that according to mythology the satyrs carried cornel sticks."

In spite of the rays of the spring sun dancing on the lilacs of the table cover, there were large pieces of wood burning in the fireplace. France gave the abbé some liqueur, which he drank in a single draught and warmed his large bony hands at the flames of the wood.

" Do you not drink this ? " he asked. " It is wonderful medicine, especially for people suffering

from gall-stones, as I do. It does me a lot of good and makes me feel different."

"Thanks, I do not drink liqueur even as a medicine. I keep it for my guests who like it."

During the luncheon the abbé talked about his parishioners, how he protected them from Socialism and other modern movements. Seeing how attentively France listened, he talked as if there were no difference of opinion between them. After having quoted a Latin proverb he began to talk Latin. He was surprised to find how well France had mastered the language of the Romans. He had to admit, although he had prided himself on being an expert, that France was better in Latin than he. The Master also impressed the abbé with his knowledge of the canonic law. Never for a moment did the abbé surmise during the conversation that he was the object of an exhaustive study and that France was looking at him as a possible figure in a novel.

It was late in the afternoon and the abbé was still in France's study, oblivious, evidently, that he had come to convert him.

"I feel so happy here," he told France with a

grateful look in his eyes. " In this atmosphere of antiquity my nerves enjoy a much-needed rest. I can well understand that, looking at life from this quiet nook, you can comprehend its wisdom and meaning. Trifles do not inconvenience you and the past is within your reach."

" Yes, in the midst of these antique pieces I have learned how futile man's life would be if he did not hold fast to the reverence of the artistic achievements of past centuries."

The abbé was in a talkative mood. We re-entered the dining-room, looking for his eye glasses. The two men stopped in front of the black cross. The abbé took it in his hands with great amazement.

" I have never seen such a Christ on the cross without cover."

" It is a rarity," France replied. " Look at his divine face. With what supreme artistry it mirrors his mental and bodily anguish ! Look how in his rose-coloured body the sufferings of Christianity's two thousand years are etherealized. Is this nudity offensive to you ? "

"No, but he is God's own child and, besides, a male."

"And if it were the body of a martyr? Let us suppose a woman."

"Woman's body is different. It leads to sin."

"If we asked the opinion of a woman, should we not find that a man's form leads also to sin?"

"I have never thought of that," answered the abbé, quite confused. "I only know that a woman's body is quite different."

V
L'ÉCOLE BRAILLE

V

L'ÉCOLE BRAILLE

ON a mild autumn morning we engaged a cab in front of the Louvre and directed the driver to take us to the École Braille, Saint-Mandé sur Seine. The slender towers of Paris, its green cupolas and the contours of its buildings looked as if they were floating in the morning haze. The Seine, meandering between two rows of mellow-coloured trees, had a glittering greenish hue. Above Notre Dame hundreds of birds were bidding farewell to the town.

" How distinct are the lines of the buildings and how vivid the colours in this early morning haze," remarked France, his eyes opening wide. " Things that inspire us æsthetically come to us like the face of a beloved one, appearing through the mist of tears. Leonardo da Vinci saw the colours better in the dawn and twilight."

Near the old tower of Saint Jacques children were playing ball. In front of the City Hall a vege-

table pedlar, such as Crainquebille might have been, found it difficult to get out of the way of a speeding cab. On the Boulevard Henri IV the housewives, with baskets on their arms, were gossiping with great animation.

We saw a motley spectacle on the Bastille Square—pretty girl factory workers, waiters from the near-by café, millers in broad-brimmed hats, shoemakers with green aprons, passers-by in high hats, a butcher with a sword-like knife, a governess with black eye-glasses, a white-coated barber and a couple of gaping children.

What was this riot about ? Nothing in particular. A cab horse, stretched out on its back and its legs jerking convulsively, was at the point of death.

Our cab reached the Orphan Asylum of the Young Workers in the Faubourg St Antoine. The shrill voices of children floated to us from the gloomy old building : " We are praying for the souls of our parents." It was a queer combination, the morning prayer of the orphans and the rumble of heavy buses and trucks.

We stopped in the middle of the Place de la

Nation, before the bronze group of Dalou, called the "Triumph of the Republic," where an old huckster, seated between two tin ovens, sold chestnuts and pancakes. Our driver bought two well-baked crispy cakes and had them brought to him by a small boy.

"There was a time," said France, "when this square was called 'Place du Trone.' No doubt, women who had grown old with hard work were selling pancakes in those days, too." Then, noticing with a smile with what relish the driver munched his cake, he remarked: "Man's aspirations may change but his appetite for food and love remains the same."

"And art?"

"With the majority of people æsthetic feeling is not well balanced. It is mostly for artists that art is so vital. What did Leonardo da Vinci care about the ecclesiastical and political battles of his age? While the cannon were booming on the Lombard Plainland, he was seeking the intimacy of ancient art."

"Old clothes!" a shabby-looking man piped into the morning air in a plaintive way.

" The noise all around us reminds me that we are in the twentieth century. I have just wanted to visualize the ' Place du Trone ' as I often saw it on old etchings. It was opened after the conclusion of the Treaty of the Pyrenees, in 1659. There was then a velvet dais in the middle of the square. How times and men are changing ! Once they had a velvet throne in this square and again they celebrated the victory of the Republic ! Man is willing to die to-day for what seems to him ridiculous to-morrow. Can a real artist be anything else, under such circumstances, than the disinterested spectator of the struggles of the human crowd ? Even if he gives a faithful picture of his age he lives his real life in the past, in the future or in a world of his own creation."

" I wish you good-morning," an old woman greeted us, in the manner of the pre-Revolutionary days, as if she were aware to whom she was speaking. She had cakes for sale.

France glanced back at Dalou's bronze group with regret.

" Dalou is a serious artist," he remarked

" Even if I am not enamoured of the style of contemporary sculptors I have to admit that his works are well balanced, almost perfect. For that reason his art has never been appreciated in France, although he has admirers. I was told that Rodin has much understanding for his classical style. This shows, by the way, that antithetical characters attract each other."

" Is not this the Cours de Vincennes, with its old trees, a beautiful wide roadway ? " I remarked.

" And how old ! " said Anatole France, looking at the golden leaves. " It dates back to the reign of the ' Père du Peuple,' as Louis XII was called. It was paved then for the first time. It connected what is the Place de la Nation to-day with the royal castle at Vincennes. Along this road the merriest ' spice-cake fairs ' were celebrated. They started at Easter Sunday and lasted until Whitsunday. The fêtes of our own days are merely poor imitations of those wonderful spring festivals. The beautiful ladies were carried in flower-bedecked coaches, and beside them rode their chevaliers in gorgeous attires. Later in the evening, the graceful

dames of the Court flirted under these leaves, and in gaudy tents the pedlars offered for sale a thousand trifles. All along the road one heard song, music and laughter. Since those days life's exuberance has been moderated. Laughter is rarer and gaiety has been civilized almost out of existence."

From the Cours de Vincennes we turned toward the Boulevard de Picpus and passed the willows of the cemetery. We asked the driver to go slowly as if anxious not to disturb the sleep of the thirteeen hundred victims of the Revolution. We alighted and went to see the tombs of General Lafayette, Fénelon and André Chénier. A thrush sang on a marble slab, and the bees hummed on the petals of the dahlias.

We reached the highway.

"We are approaching Saint-Mandé," said France. "Presently we will be with our blind friends. They will be glad to get the books—poor sick Pierre and the blind little girls. How many books did Carmen Sylva send?"

"Forty."

She had sent them to me to give to the blind

friends of Anatole France. They had been printed in the queen's own shop for the use of her blind wards. There were French, English and German books among those we had brought with us.

" Our blind friends will have something to read with their fingers. Your Carmen Sylva is a good soul. I will have to write to her thanking her for the pleasure she gave the blind and—through them —to me. No, I shall not write. It must be horrible to write to a queen, even if she is as intelligent and good-hearted as Carmen Sylva. Please write to her and tell her that her kindness has deeply moved me, and that I offer my homage to her good heart."

The old porter met us at the gate of the impressive building.

" *Mon Dieu !* What a surprise ! Our patients will be so happy to see you, Master."

He rang a dozen bells, talked about the blind, laughed and moved around happily. His tired eyes lit up as he telephoned to the director in a booming voice. France, who had procured this position for the old man, keenly watched this demonstration of happiness as an aid to self-confidence.

The director and two other officials took us across the court, in the middle of which a fountain splashed.

" They wanted to take this fountain from us and put it in some museum," explained one of the officials to me, " but the Master, who was touched by the devotion of the blind to their nymphs, persuaded the authorities to leave it with us."

" Look," interposed France, " how glossy the marble fountain has become from the touch of the warm fingers of the blind. The prettiest nymph is the glossiest. There are blind people who feel more keenly that which is æsthetically beautiful than many who have eyes. Instead of the physical vision an inner light is glowing in them, and they develop a high grade of sensibility."

The blind, basking in the sun, heard the voice of France and stumbled toward the gate—the flock hearkening to the voice of the shepherd. There were a few mutes among them who ejaculated peculiar sounds, " fa . . . fa . . . fa . . ."

One of their number succeeded in opening the gate and the others followed him, their arms out-

stretched, their faces transfigured. The mute ones repeated almost convulsively, " fa . . . fa . . . fa . . ."

" My dear friends," France hurried to them and grasped their hands, " Here I am ! "

The blind took him in their midst, caressed his clothes and turned towards him as if they saw him. They called him " darling Master," and pleaded with him not to forget them and visit them as often as he could. They entreated him to speak to them so that light might replace their darkness.

On the green-coloured garden benches the blind sat around and listened to him wistfully. He called each of them by name and asked them about their worries, gave them advice and encouragement. He also told them serious and funny stories and distributed sweets, cigarettes and cigars. He told them that the books he brought had been sent by Carmen Sylva, the Queen of Rumania.

" If you are with us, if we can hear your voice," said a former chemist, who had lost his eyesight twenty years ago, " we feel as happy as if we could see."

" There is not so much beauty in the visible world as in his books," sighed a young tubercular patient who had lost his sight only a short time ago. " If we could only read Anatole France. That would be real happiness ! "

There were doubt, resignation, complaint and yearning in the words of the blind. The autumnal breeze was pregnant with the odour of dead leaves.

" Where is my little Pierre ? " asked France. " I hope he is not ill ? "

" He feels better now," answered an old woman, " but he has been sick for two weeks. He usually sits under the big oak tree at the end of the garden. Little Jeannette tells him her visions. That child sees miraculous things every night and even during the day when she is alone. You know, she was born blind."

Beneath the big oak tree we found Pierre, and beside him on the bench little Jeannette, a very bashful and sensitive girl, seven years old, who always wanted to be alone because, as she said, she could not bear the smell and voices of people.

Pierre was the only exception. They sat speechless, evidently listening to our footsteps.

" How are you to-day, dear Pierre ? "

We stood before horror incarnated. One could not tell whether he was young or old ; his body was so racked by sickness. His face was so full of abscesses that he was absolutely repugnant. Kindness was struggling in France with his æsthetic feeling. Yet he shook Pierre's hands.

" You did not even know that I was here ? "

" I did know, Master. I heard your voice from a distance. Now that you ask me how I am, I feel much better. It is no use complaining about my pains, anyway. They will end only with my life. But your presence relieves my sufferings. And besides, little Jeannette is here and her kindness reconciles me a bit to life."

Pierre felt instinctively that sympathy made France suffer at that moment more than he himself did.

" Master, you must not suffer on my account," he pleaded. " You have often saved me from despair."

Little Jeannette stood up on her tiptoes, stretched her weak body and with her almost transparent hand began to search for something in France's inside pocket.

"Are you looking for sweets, little Jeannette?"

"I can smell roasted almonds in your outside pocket, but I do not want them. I am looking for the clockwork of your life."

"Who made you call the heart by that name, child? What do you want to do with it? Tell me."

"I cannot," answered Jeanette with amazing seriousness. "I have known the secret for two days, but I have not told it to Pierre, either. I do not want to make him sorry."

She shook her head and her frail body trembled.

Little Jeannette was suffering from heart disease. The other day when the doctor examined her he waved with his hand, the blind girl felt it, and he whispered to the director that the clockwork of the poor child's life would not stand the strain much longer.

Jeannette realized that the clockwork of her life was her heart.

She asked France to let her listen to his heart. France took the girl in his arms and pressed her blonde head against his heart. With her lips hard set Jeannette listened attentively, and loudly exclaimed :

" It does not beat like mine ! You will live ! "

VI
BJÖRNSON'S DEATH

VI

BJÖRNSON'S DEATH

IN the year of the great flood spring came late to Paris. Cold winds swept the flooded Rue de Rivoli. During those stormy days Björnstjerne Björnson, the great Norwegian writer, was fighting death in the Hotel Wagram, near the Place de la Concorde. He had been accompanied to Paris by his wife, his daughter, who was married to Ibsen, and his son Jivron Jawron Björnson. Seeking his health, they had brought him to that old and distinguished hotel, where they now occupied an entire floor. They had a Norwegian nurse, two governesses, two valets, and had settled down in the spacious rooms inhabited in bygone centuries by princes and dukes.

The Björnsons, a wealthy family, led a patriarchal life in the midst of all the luxury which was their natural atmosphere. A prayer-book and eyeglasses rested on a small table beside a large bouquet of orchids. On the artistic mantelpiece medi-

cine bottles and half-read books were lying around.

The salon, arranged for the patient, fronted on the balcony, was once the reception-room of princes. Most of the furniture had been removed and only the most necessary pieces remained. The heavy silk curtains had been replaced by muslin, which gave free access to the rays of the sun.

It was in this room that Anatole France visited the Norwegian writer for the last time. They had seldom seen each other, and their contact would have been even less intimate if it had not been for a great occasion which brought them together, the Dreyfus affair. This, more than anything else, was a demonstration of the solidarity of the two great and noble minds. When France was fighting for the rehabilitation of Captain Dreyfus, Björnson did everything to assist him. It was then that he uttered the significant words, " Anatole France accomplished more with his weak hands by writing his name at the bottom of a document in favour of Dreyfus than hundreds of thousands of labourers with their strong hands."

BJÖRNSTJERNE BJÖRNSON, THE GREAT NORWEGIAN WRITER, WITH MRS. BJÖRNSON

Mrs Ibsen, who had a very expressive and delicate face, and her brother, a grey-haired strong shouldered man, waited for France in the hall. To the question as to how the patient was, Mrs. Ibsen answered :

" There is no change in his condition. He is seemingly strong and robust. He speaks very seldom and tells us beautiful things. At the threshold of death he sees things with amazing clarity. His intellect grasps the mysteries of the eternal. He speaks about bathing in the bottomless waters of the fjords and listening at the foot of Father Death, to the secrets of Life. His thoughts are sometimes moving so rapidly we cannot follow them. All we see is that he is struggling with Death, and is making his last account with Life."

The governess announced that Mrs. Björnson would see us in the patient's room.

" We have had no elevator since the flood," Mrs. Ibsen told France as she took him by the arm.

We slowly mounted the wide stairs. The hall was uncannily silent, as if the entire hotel were intent on showing their profound respect for the man

who was about to die. We, too, spoke in whispered tones for fear that Björnson's wife, whom the vigil of many nights had made over-sensitive, might be disturbed by our talk.

Finally, we reached the suite of the Björnsons. Very slowly the door opened and we entered on tiptoes, with bated breath. The pride of Norway, the white-maned "Norwegian lion," was lying in a huge bed, his head propped up by many pillows. We stopped near the door. Mrs Björnson waved to France, who walked up to her and kissed her trembling hand. They stood mute near the patient, whom suffering had driven far beyond consciousness. We were absorbed in the contemplation of his extremely large head and strong neck, which, even in his dying hours, he proudly threw back against the pillows. His chest rose and fell beneath the cover, like the rollers of a machine. The shadow of an inner struggle hovered over his forehead, above his deep-set eyes. Two deep furrows near the mouth showed that he had suffered much.

We did not move. The silence was painful, like an open wound which one did not dare to touch.

Only the medicine bottles seemed to be trembling, alive in the midst of the dead calm. The blue and yellow flasks cast their colours on the colourless ones, as if they would penetrate each other in the cold glitter of the dark marble slab.

Suddenly we felt, rather than saw, that Björnson was about to awaken. His powerful head moved and his tired eyelids trembled over his lustreless eyes. He breathed deeply and opened his eyes, which, one could see, were of a beautiful blue. His glance rested on Anatole France, who stood at the foot of the bed. His pale face flushed and his dying eyes became animated. He looked at France intently, as if he had wanted to overcome a barrier, or as if he had seen him from very far away and did not feel strong enough to approach him. We felt the intensity of his wish not to lose his consciousness. We saw on the contracting muscles of his face that he was afraid of losing life before he could greet France.

Perspiration was running down his forehead, and his lips were trembling as he stammered :

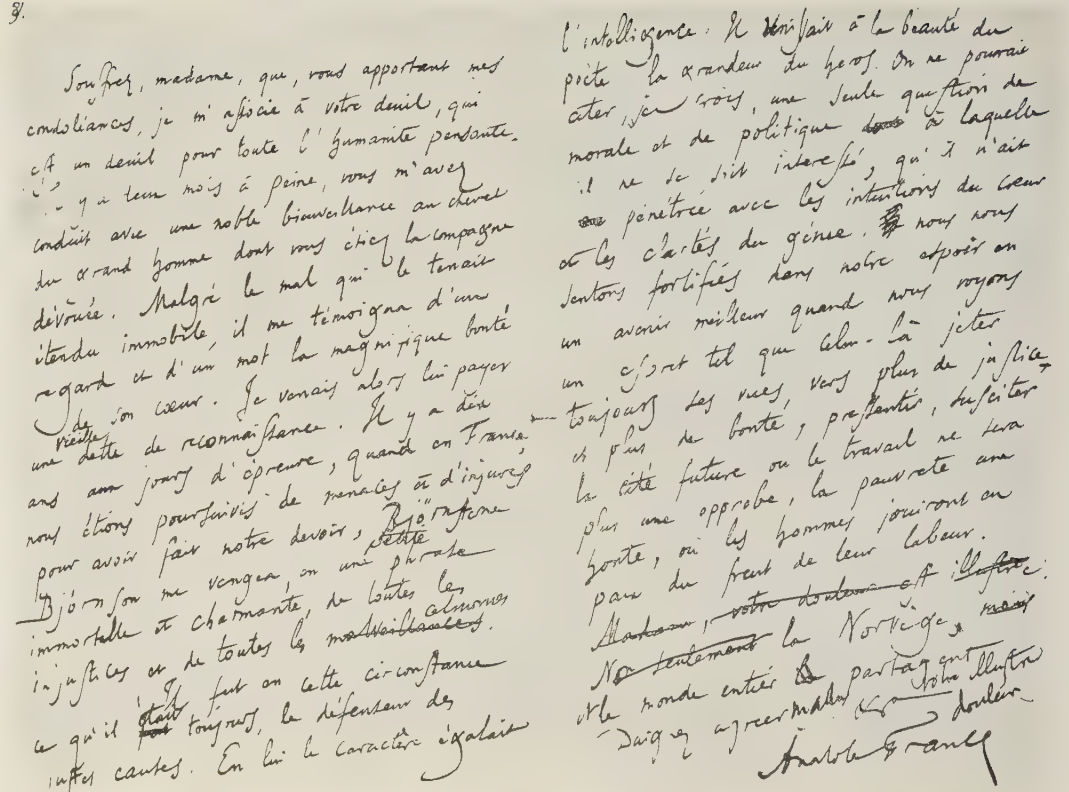
" Is it you . . . France . . . Anatole . . . you

. . . what a . . . man . . . what . . . a . . . man what . . . an . . . artist ! "

" Do not answer him ! " said Mrs. Björnson sadly, " he does not hear you. You can express your affection for him with a move of your hand. He yearns for affection. He would like everybody to understand him—to love him."

France leaned forward in his elegant way. He understood the meaning of the last words of Björnson. Moved by an irresistible sympathy, he pressed his hands against the forehead of the dying poet. Tears were trembling in the eyes of every one as Björnson bade farewell to life.

" We feel," wrote France in his letter of condolence to Mrs Björnson, " that our hope for a better future is justified, as long as there are men such as he, who has always upheld the cause of justice, who was a firm believer in the advent of the day when labour will be extolled and poverty will not be a shame, and when man will enjoy in peace the fruit of his good works."



ANATOLE FRANCE'S LETTER OF CONDOLENCE TO MRS. BJÖRNSON ON THE DEATH OF HER HUSBAND

VII
THE LITTLE RED COAT

VII

THE LITTLE RED COAT

WE had prepared everything for our trip to Italy. I had put a few books in the spacious travelling bag, above the manuscript of "The Revolt of the Angels." Anatole France sat beside me, a skull-cap on his head, and was talking about the things he was anxious to see again: the antique statues in Naples, the churches of Florence, the lovely Italian market-places, the tiny little houses on the banks of the Arno which reminded him of Dante . . . Giotto, Donatello, the Pitti, Uffizi, the Battistero, the palaces in Verona, its magnificent gates, Rome, Perugia, Sienna, and many other Italian towns which the tourists seldom visit and which he knew thoroughly.

A sudden gust shook the silk curtain at the open window. A piece of pine crackled on the fireplace. France shuddered.

"You see that I am nervous—and timid, too," he added after a moment's reflection.

" It is natural that your nerves should be over-sensitive—as to your timidity——"

" Do not try to convince me to the contrary," he waved his hand with a sardonic smile. " If I have to fight for an idea or a cause I do not lack courage. I am not speaking about that type of timidity, which I should call impotence or cowardice. My timidity is of a different kind—it is congenital, to a certain extent, like genius and sin. It was accelerated in its growth by an incident in my childhood which has increased my conviction that, in our innermost soul, we are always alone."

The setting sun was full of mystery and the twilight dragged in its wake the secrets of the approaching night, stifled sighs and long shadows. In the golden-coloured mist there was lurking a tale, waiting to be told on that spring evening.

" Tell me," I entreated him, " the history of that incident."

" The story is about a little red coat," said he, " It is in connection with my mother." He put his eyeglasses on his desk, near an antique Greek torso. The old housekeeper brought in camellia tea and

the evening papers. When the sound of her steps had died away and the curtain on the door closed after her, France continued :

" I loved my mother, whom I vividly remember working very hard in our little apartment adjoining my father's bookshop. She cooked us nourishing food, the taste of which still lingers in my mouth, and took good care of the only ornaments of our rooms—the flowers. She always made my suits out of her own and father's garments. Father used to tease her, saying that she never wore her best dresses so that they would not be threadbare before she made them into suits for me. There must have been some truth in this joke. Once, I remember, grandmother told me, smilingly :

" ' Your mother has bought herself a pretty dress to-day but as she was caressing its softness, she remarked that it would make a wonderful coat for you. I'm certain that the dress will be more often in the closet than on her.'

" My father laughed, mother alone remained serious and looked at me fondly. I did not surmise then how much suffering that new coat, my little

red coat, would cause me afterward. A couple of months later the coat was mine, and I put it on one Easter Sunday. I went to church with my little schoolmates, who found my red coat quite funny, and told me that I looked like a tongue stuck out.

" When the service was over and I started home along the banks of the Seine, the boys shouted at me: ' Hey, you Easter egg ! ' A sudden anger seized me and I beat all whom I could reach. Full of bitterness, I ran home to my mother to reproach her for my humiliation. When I reached home the first thing I did was to tear off my red coat and trample it under foot. Scarcely had I trodden upon it when, with a crack, one of its buttons broke. All of a sudden my anger evaporated and I felt very sad. As I was picking up the broken pieces of the button I shed copious tears. The buttons had been taken from my mother's holiday dress, which she had liked very much. My father had reproved her for doing so. ' He will not be grateful to you,' he had said. While I was thinking of these words I dusted my little coat and hung it on a nail. Mother, who had just at that moment come into the room,

was moved by what she took to be my deep affection for the coat. She pressed me against her breast and I began to cry bitterly. I was about to pour out my grievance against the world when she, noticing the broken button, and thinking that I was worried on account of it, began to console me.

" ' Do not cry, darling, I have another button exactly like this one.' "

While France was talking I could not help pondering what he looked like as a child. I visualized a picture of his which I had seen on his desk. He resembled a porcelain miniature, delicate and timid. His dark eyes, full of questions, were, at the same time, very expressive.

" The Easter vacation passed very quickly and I may say happily," he continued. " My grandmother told me beautiful stories and my mother took me for walks, and I wore my little red coat often. Fortunately, we did not meet my schoolmates. It was only after the vacation that my Calvary began anew. On the very first day, my classmates tortured me beyond endurance. My obdurate pride seemed to annoy the boys. They

knew no bounds in tormenting me. I had become timid, almost awkward. I ceased to play with the other boys as I used to do before. And I did not want to be asked what was the matter with me. I lived an introspective life and devoted my time mainly to reading and thinking. I was not quite eight years of age and yet I knew that I could not expose my sentiments to others."

He stood up, walked past the book-shelves and threw a sad glance at the glass-covered drawers containing his Tanagra statuettes. He took a bronze bell from his desk, handling it with great affection. He took its tongue between his two fingers and, noticing that I looked at him with surprise in my eyes, he turned towards me as if he had just remembered that I was there.

" You see," he said in a hushed voice, " this Renaissance bell is as sensitive as if it had a soul. If one pulls it impatiently it does not sound, its tongue gets stuck. I am just trying to ascertain whether its sensitiveness is intentional or merely an accident. People of the Renaissance were quite remarkable ; strong, warlike and occasionally

bloodthirsty. They were devilishly irreligious and devotedly pious ; merciless and considerate. It is difficult to measure their virtues and sins. Perhaps the artisan who made this bell wanted to punish impatience by making it as it is.

" Well, to continue my story about the red coat. One day when my sufferings reached what seemed to me the pitch, after the other boys had started a general attack on me, I ran home, my face red with suppressed emotion, ready to tell everything to my mother, and to ask her to rid me of that horrible little coat. She had seen me from a distance and, as she had often done, came to meet me at the door.

" ' Mother, Mother ! ' I began, quite out of breath. But I could not continue. My tongue simply would not move. It stuck from the excitement and I broke down, sobbing.

" ' My dear little boy,' my mother exclaimed, giving me a warm hug, ' you were running to have your kiss. How wonderful you look in this little red coat ! ' After that I wore my red coat for two more years. I could have worn it the third year,

too, because I took good care of it. But I had outgrown it. My mother had to remake it into a collar coat."

Bettie, the Breton parlourmaid, came into the room at this moment. She removed the wick of the candles and singing in her lilting Breton accent, announced :

" Dinner is served."

We walked down to the main dining-room, stopping several times on the stairs. We wanted to enjoy the antique Greek bas-reliefs on the wall. But France's favourite was the poet's tomb, excavated near the Parthenon. Many art critics admired the sad genius of an unknown deity carved into the richly-veined Pentelikon marble. Whenever France had leisure he would stop in front of it. He had opened my eyes to its manifold beauties. On this occasion, too, he spoke to me about it, as I leaned against the railing.

"The arrangement of the drapery on the antique statuary is perfect. The ancient sculptors competed with nature in producing marvellous wavy effects, creating marble tunics and marble

veils. The sculpture of the ancient Greeks is not sophisticated. Everything comes of itself, as naturally as tears and smiles."

There were candles burning in the large chandeliers, on the mantelpiece and on the oak table in the dining-room, where dinner was served. The burning candles reminded me of a church. France did not like electricity. He thought that electric light was "arrogant." Whatever electric bulbs there were in the salon and elsewhere in the house were so hidden that their light should not affect the harmony of the discreet tones of the old furniture and the other antiques.

The housekeeper came in and enumerated the dishes of the menu, "Veal potage, roast chicken, salad, cheese, fruit. I hope that Monsieur has a good appetite. Anything else—small cakes, perhaps?"

At France's nod that everything was in order and that he wished nothing else, Madame Josephine left as noiselessly as she had entered. We ate our soup in silence. When the roast chicken was served, France talked about Emperor Hadrian.

" After a battle," he said, " he had bonfires on the meadows and had twenty-four oxen roasted in their flames. He himself turned the largest ox on a spit. He carved it with his sword, giving the best portions to his generals. Hadrian was familiar with the anatomy of the ox. Then they ate, most likely with better appetites than we eat this tiny chicken, and drank fiery red wine from goatskin bags. When the repast was over they danced to the tunes of the piper."

" May I place a small bit of this *salade romaine* on your plate, Master ? It is your favourite dish."

"I would like to have some of it. It is refreshing. Apart from this I like it for a reason which I am inclined to call religious. It reminds me of that delightful gourmand, Rabelais, the sardonic and witty rector of Meudon. It brings to my mind his repasts and debaucheries, his rather improper Gargantua."

We ate the juicy pears of Normandy, talking about Rabelais. No one knew better his writings and biography than France. The " Société Rabe-

laisienne" called on him every year to ask data about the poet's life.

"*L'Intransigeant! La Presse!*"

The shrill voices of newsvendors broke the silence of the Villa Saïd. France noticed the gleam of curiosity in my eyes.

"Let us go over to the Jeanne d'Arc corner of the small salon to read our Racine," he said and looked at me teasingly, as if he were saying, "Even if you do not like it we will take refuge in the glorious past from the commonplace present."

The salon with its many pictures was like an art gallery and led to a smaller room, a part of which was called the Jeanne d'Arc corner. France had so called it after a fourteenth century gobelin with the equestrian picture of the Virgin of Orleans. Bettie had prepared the two large armchairs, a small table with a candle and France's eye-glasses. I took Racine from the shelves.

"Please start again with what we read yesterday."

"Ah douleur non encore éprouvée!
A quel nouveau tourment je me suis réservée!"

The candles were burning with a crackling noise. The melted wax from one was dropping with monotonous regularity to the foot of the Renaissance crucifix. In the street motor cars were tooting, bound for the Bois de Boulogne. I read about the agony of the great Phèdre. France listened pensively. My voice grew tired when I had reached the last lines :

> " Et la mort, à mes yeux dérobant la clarté,
> Rend au jour qu'ils souillaient toute sa pureté."

For some time we sat in silence.

" I was looking for Phèdre's soul," France said. " I doubt whether one could find a woman like her in our days. I do not think that even Racine would be successful. Since his time woman's soul has undergone great changes. Great passions no longer haunt her, neither do they haunt the soul of man."

" Shall I call a cab ? " asked old Josephine, who came in every night at nine o'clock to remind me of the hour.

" I will take a bus to-night, thank you."

" Then I will go with you as far as the Étoile. A short walk will do me good," volunteered France.

In the ante-chamber Josephine helped him with his threadbare overcoat and after having brushed it with her hands, she remarked :

" Monsieur will not catch cold to-night in this light overcoat. While you were in the salon we had a good downpour. It was so warm that stupid little Bettie went out to wash her hair in the rain."

After a few steps we reached the end of the Villa Saïd. The spring breeze had blown away the clouds and the stars were gazing at the interminable row of lights on the avenue. We walked slowly, France leaning on his stick and making an occasional remark about Paris, his pet subject. But his thoughts were in Italy, whither we were to go the following morning :

When I boarded the bus he called after me :

" Let us be on time at the station to-morrow."

VIII
IN NAPLES

VIII

IN NAPLES

EVERY morning we visited the pictures, etchings and antique statuary of the Museo Nationale of Naples. France was indefatigable and more enthusiastic in his appreciation of art than ever. In the afternoons we made trips to different parts of the bay.

Returning from an excursion to Torre del Greco, we suddenly realized that it was holy week. The streets looked different. Radishes, oranges, red eggs and Easter lambs were swinging on long ropes wherever we looked. Some of the slaughtered lambs were decorated with flowers.

"What a hypnotic power Catholicism exerts over its believers," remarked France, his sadness mingled with sarcasm, "and how well it knows its human material, their gluttony and sensuality. Look at the faces of these people. Their eyes glow as they examine these poor little beasts."

"Easter lamb, Easter lamb!" dirty little children cried gleefully.

" Your mother will roast them for you," France told them smilingly, " and all of you will eat it. Even the poorest *bambino* will have the fat of it. Are you not sorry for the poor little lambs ? "

" *E grazia lei, Signore !* " shouted the gang of children, picking up the *soldi* France had thrown at them in handfuls. Our cab slowed down as if the driver had been in conspiracy with the little rascals. Encouraged by this, the tiny black devils jumped on the fender, the coach box, even as far as our seats. Two children were riding on our legs, caressing us with their sticky little hands. Finally, I had a saving thought. With a sudden turn, I threw the bag of *soldi*, which had been concealed in the lap-robe, out of the coach. We always carried a bag of coins with us. This time there might have been about three *lire* worth of *soldi* in it. The bag opened in falling and out poured the coins. The whole crowd raced after it, picking up the money from the dust.

" *Andiamo, presto, presto !* " I commanded the driver, who by this time seemed to understand the reason for my little trick. Whipping his horses,

he rushed away. Later he found it difficult to stop them in front of the shop of Casella on the Piazza Municipio.

"*Buona sera, Master!*" greeted every one in the shop. The owner stood up from his chair and hastened to meet his visitor. At the same time two men, one old and the other middle-aged, came to us from the farthest end of the shop.

"Signor France," exclaimed the oldest Casella, who, although ninety-six and quite shrunken, was extremely vivacious. "I heard your voice and I came back. My son and grandson would want to make me go to bed at half past six . . . but I am glad to see you . . . you were delayed . . . I have been waiting for you the last half-hour."

France wanted to shake his hand but it was not easy, because the little mummy had sunk it into his pocket and fumbled in it with great eagerness.

"Here you are," said he smilingly, as he dragged out a package wrapped in a dotted red handkerchief. After having unfolded it first from the handkerchief and then from silk paper, he put a little yellow parchment booklet, smelling of the

stuffy air of the basement, into France's hand. The moths had made some inroads into its paper. "I have discovered this, the oldest edition of Dante," said the old man proudly. " It is yours, Master ! My son could not see it because of his eye-glasses, and my grandson because his eyes are too good to bother with such tiny books. Youth does not see much nowadays. They need my old eyes to find something in our collection of books."

France turned the book over with devotion, almost religious. His fingers hardly touched the rustling leaves while we glanced at the book over his shoulder. An apprentice closed the shop and we sat down at the counter, which was a hundred and sixty years old. The Casellas piled their greatest treasures in front of us, the oldest, the most yellow and stuffiest-smelling volumes. Each of them had its history. When we left them France did not want to accept the oldest Dante edition as a gift. Finally, the old man prevailed upon him. " Perhaps this is my last discovery," he pleaded, "and I could not lie in peace if I did not present this book to the greatest bibliophile in the world."

FRANCE WITH HIS FRIEND AND PUBLISHER, M. CASELLA, NAPLES

I reeled out of the bookshop. Old Casella's princely gift was in my care.

* * * * *

Arriving at our hotel, I had only time before dinner to go to the kitchen and taste the dishes prepared for France. He usually ate very little but his taste was extremely sensitive. Like many Frenchmen, he was initiated into the secrets of the culinary art. For that reason, wherever we went I tried to gain the friendship of the chefs and cooks by generous tips. If the dish had the least defect, either in the quality of the food or in its preparation, France would not eat it. Despite all my efforts he used to go on a " hunger strike," as I called it, in some of Italy's best hotels, and for days would eat only fruit because the butter or the oil was not up to his standard.

Generally we took our meals in the main dining-room, provided France did not feel too weak. On such occasions he remained in his rooms. To-night we had our dinner at the dining-room table, which was gorgeously decorated with flowers. In spite of my precautions our first dish did not please

France. It was frog with cream, and he found that the cream was not fresh. His physician, Doctor Couchoud, who joined us in Naples, encouraged France to eat something else, but he would not take more than a few bites of anything we offered him. The doctor and I felt awkward on account of our ravenous appetites.

After dinner we went to the balcony overlooking the sea. France leaned back in his armchair and enjoyed the sound of the waves. The doctor lit a cigar and I smoked a Macedonian cigarette. After a few minutes, which we spent in complete silence, France asked me to bring him the manuscript of " The Revolt of the Angels." He liked to read to us and to-night he wanted to read that part of the fourteenth chapter in which he described how uneasy Arcade, the angel, felt among mortals. Their pettiness pained him. One night he confessed this to the beautiful archangel, Zita, who took him to Nectaire, the gardener, who was the best musician among the angels descended to earth. The sound of Nectaire's flute cured every ill.

France had just begun to read when a street

dancer, dressed gaudily, jumped forward from the surging crowd. She stepped directly beneath our balcony and stood there ready to dance the tarantella. The musicians began to play. France arose nervously ; " Please throw her a couple of *lire*. I do not want to hear that noise." Unluckily, the *lire* had the opposite effect. It made the musicians more enthusiastic. France fled to his room and I summoned the porter to send them away, although both the doctor and I should have liked to listen to them. After a few moments the director of the hotel came and announced that we would not be further annoyed during holy week. They all respected the religious feelings of the Master, and could understand his dislike for profane music.

I would have burst out with laughter had not France bidden me to keep silent by pressing his index finger against his lips. Soon we were again sitting on the balcony.

" How remarkable," France said, smiling jovially, " that man always judges others by his own standards. Possibly many readers of my books do

the same. They judge me according to their own temperament and character."

Vesuvius was smoking silently, and the sea rose and fell like the human breast. We smelt the odour of the almond trees. For a few seconds the silence was complete. Young men raced by, holding their mandolins under their overcoats. Every now and then a donkey-cart passed, laden with vegetables and milk-cans. Hundreds of yellow glittering dots were strewn all over the bay. On the shore, the towers and cupolas, chimneys and cypress trees, standing like giant exclamation marks, gave a definite character to the shadow world around us. At the end of the horizon, where the pale colour of the sky seemed to have sucked the blue out of the sea, Capri was floating like a giant dolphin, surrounded by tiny fishing schooners. A large boat was slowly moving towards Sorrento. Somewhere in the darkness, we did not know where, a hoarse harmonica plaintively rehearsed the fate of the soldier separated from his sweetheart.

France stood up and leaned over the stone

FRANCE ON THE VESUVIUS

balustrade, his eye fixed on Posilipo. He tried to distinguish the villas and the gardens which in the daytime looked like Oriental rugs.

"How beautiful our Posilipo is in this multi-coloured darkness!" he exclaimed. "It reminds me of a huge shell, washed ashore. I can visualize the gardens of Lucullus and understand Virgil's love for the place. It must have been glorious to write his poems in the playground of Tiberius, Claudius, Titus and Hadrian. There is no other place in Italy that can be connected with so many events of Greek and Roman history as this magnificent bay, through which Greek civilization conquered Western Europe and into which sailing galleys brought the treasures of Hellas."

The sea winds began to sigh more loudly. The filmy mist slowly rose and the stars shone brilliantly.

* * * * *

At half past eight the following morning I was preparing coffee for France. Breakfast did not take much time. While drinking our coffee I summed up the main contents of the papers and submitted the day's programme for his approval.

Sometimes France would make some changes in it. If the weather were fair we would go on foot to the museum, if it should rain we would take a cab.

The museum guards greeted us amiably. Now and then a few English or American visitors would recognize France and ask him for his autograph.

In this "Temple of the Beautiful," as the Master liked to call it, we slowly went from one room to the other. He stopped only before his favourites and called attention to their charms. We could not help thinking that the antique marbles were talking to him. His face would light up and his eyes would be glowing. France not only admired art, he knew how to make it admired by others. One day he noticed a museum guard who was yawning in the midst of the most exquisite antique statues. He approached him in the most genial way.

"Don't you think that that statue of the Deity of Science is beautiful? Look at her attentively. She is charming and the texture of the marble is like living flesh, warm and elastic. And she has a seductive smile."

FRANCE ON THE STEPS OF THE MUSEUM, IN NAPLES

The guard slowly opened his eyes and looked fixedly at the beautiful marble, which, although he had been in the museum for three years, he had never noticed. He confessed this to France, who, in hushed tones, continued to teach him how to see and to understand.

" The Beautiful and True are twins born of Nature and the imagination of the artist. In order to appreciate them one has to approach them with a religious devotion."

At the end of the interview the guard asked France to recommend to him a good book about the arts. The Master promised to give him a book which he would find helpful in learning how to see the beautiful.

France called one statue the " gingerbread Minerva " on account of its charmingly primitive pose and the delicately carved marble. Not far away stood the statue of two wrestling slaves. France scrutinized them from every direction and made this comment :

" Their muscles are marvellous. It is remarkable how much faith these slaves have in their

strength. They show how much Michel Angelo had learned the from masters of antiquity, and how much Rodin learned from Michel Angelo. It is thus that the source of Beauty trickles incessantly through many centuries.

" Look carefully at the head of Socrates, beside the head of Marcus Aurelius. Both of them express high intelligence but how much more Socrates shows us than wisdom. Do you see that line of bitter disappointment which stretches from his eyes to the corner of his mouth. The sadness of his eyes gives his head its individuality. It expresses his real being, his genius. Socrates was a genius and a real artist ! He was a sculptor when a youth and we have one of his works, the statue of the Khorites, on the Acropolis of Athens. He has become a philosopher on account of his melancholy. A great sculptor must never be melancholic."

In the next room we sat in front of the bas-relief of Orpheus, Eurydice and Mercury. This piece, one of his pets, always reminded him of a Greek poem on the immortality of beauty.

" How natural is the gesture of these three

figures intertwining like rose branches. So much beauty of form and composition, so much lightness and delicacy, must have come to us from the school of Pheidias. Praxiteles is heavier and more condensed."

When we reached the statue of Venus Callipyge, France remarked :

" This is not great art. Yet, the charming lines offer the eyes rest and entertainment. That squatting little hussy is more valuable. In art as in everything else aggressiveness counts for much. She who shows her beauty with less restraint receives more attention than those who hide it. That little immoral person, although she is more artistic than Venus, has lost against the goddess. It is the same with the women of flesh and blood."

When he noticed a roguish smile on Doctor Couchoud's lips, he added jovially :

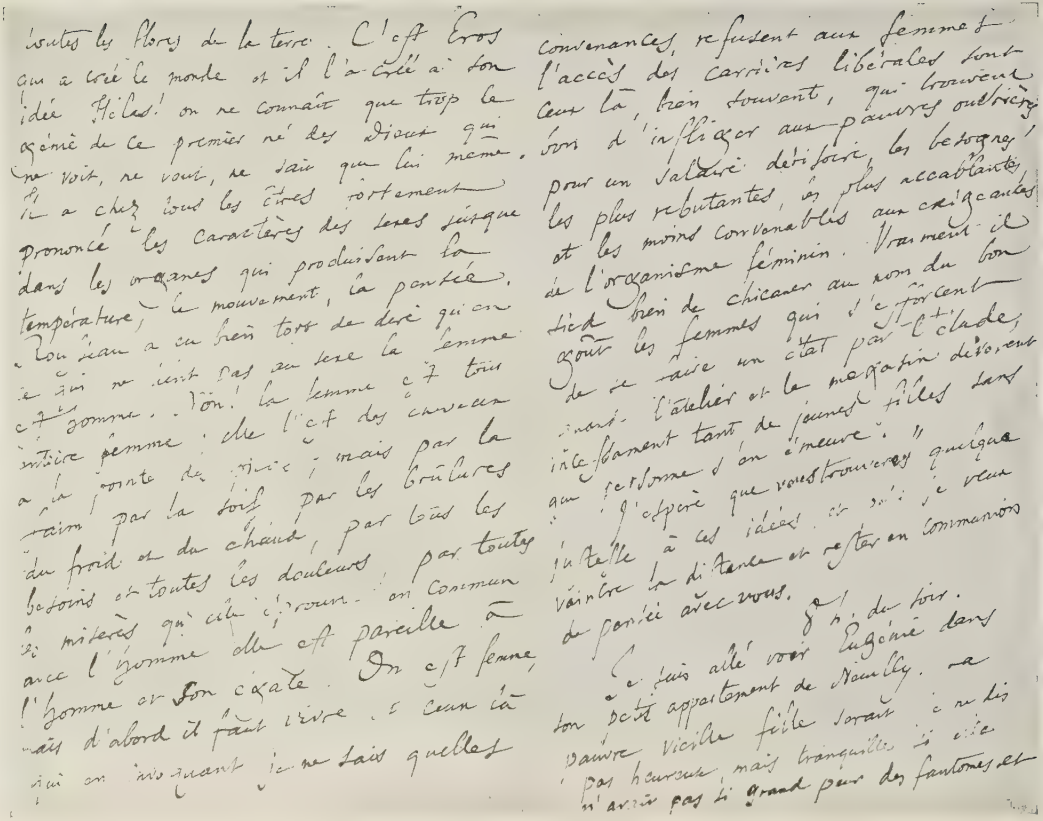
" Well if you wish to know my opinion about women I can give it to you. I admire and love every woman, Jeanne d'Arc and even Thaïs. I feel towards them as I feel towards the flowers ; they are all lovely and therefore they are lovable. They

amuse me and they please me, but, as to the flowers, I put only those which I love most in my buttonhole above my heart."

Before visiting the frescoes discovered at Pompeii we paid a short visit to the antique bronzes. France was particularly charmed with a Hercules, a Narcissus, and a Satyr dancing with a Silenus. He looked at them first from close range, examining every detail, then scrutinised them from a distance. He tried not to look at many things in a day, but often he could not withstand the temptation. He admired the Japanese for their temperance in the enjoyment of art.

"They are the most intelligent connoisseurs of art," he once told me. "They do not look at more than two or three objects during a visit. I am shocked to see people racing through the Louvre in a couple of hours. They do not see anything."

To-day he wanted to see his favourite bronze statue, the winged Victory. However, on his way, he could not help stealing a look at the old faun picking grapes and at the Pompeian animal statuettes. Nor could he withstand the temptation of



toutes les flores de la terre. C'est Eros qui a créé le monde et il l'a créé à son idée. Hélas! on ne connaît que trop le génie de ce premier né des dieux qui ne voit, ne veut, ne sait que lui même. Il a chez tous les êtres fortement prononcé les caractères des sexes jusque dans les organes qui produisent la température, le mouvement, la pensée. Socrate a eu bien tort de dire qu'on n'a pas vu sexe la femme c'est gomme. Non! la femme c'est toute entière femme: chez l'est des cheveux à la pointe de pieds; mais par la raison par la soif, par les brûlures du froid et du chaud, par tous les besoins et toutes les douleurs, par toutes les misères qu'elle éprouve, on commun avec l'homme elle est pareille à l'homme et son égale. Or c'est femme, mais d'abord il faut vivre. Ce sont là ici en invoquant je ne sais quelles convenances, refusent aux femmes l'accès des carrières libérales sont ceux là, bien souvent, qui trouvent bon d'imposer aux pauvres ouvrières pour un salaire dérisoire, les besognes les plus rebutantes, les plus accablantes et les moins convenables au délicates de l'organisme féminin. Vraiment il faut bien de chicaner au nom du bon goût les femmes qui s'efforcent de se faire un état par l'étude, l'atelier et le magasin désorment inintéressant tant de jeunes filles dans qui personne s'émeuve. Quelque fois j'espère que vous trouverez quelque juste à ces idées et si je veux vaincre la distance et rester en communion de pensée avec vous.

Je suis allé voir Eugénie dans son petit appartement de Neuilly. La pauvre vieille fille serait si elle n'avait pas si grand peur des fantômes et

gazing at the objects of art excavated at Herculaneum. He looked with particular pleasure at a chubby satyr with a flute.

"The difference between Pompeian and Herculanean sculpture is the difference between Greek and Roman art," he said almost inaudibly, talking to himself. "The one is more refined while the other is more rugged. Greek art is graceful; it is like the reflection of clouds on the blue waters of the Ægean. Roman art, on the other hand, is robust, like the peaks of the Apennines. The difference between them is that of the genius and talent."

When he spoke thus to himself we did not like to disturb him with questions. Doctor Couchoud who analysed every mood of the Master, said that on such occasions he was communing with his genius.

We then hurried up the stairs to see Iphigenia while the daylight was still strong. It seemed to me that these magnificent frescoes, dug out from their ancient tombs at Pompeii, and enjoying a new and more brilliant life, were waiting for the daily

visits of France. And we, the " humble pilgrims " in search of Beauty, looked at them affectionately.

The following day we were at the museum before the gate was opened. It was our last chance to see our favourites before the Easter holiday. Like a college boy burning with the desire to see his sweetheart, France ate a hurried breakfast and, anxious not to lose a moment, led us to the museum. So fast did he go up the stairs that we could hardly overtake him. He first stopped at Correggio's " Zingarella," a small picture, representing a charming youthful Madonna with an infant. Her beautiful oval gypsy face expressed both seriousness and hilarity, as if she were asking : " What shall I do with this baby ? "

" Here is my pretty one," France greeted her ; " look how happy she is this morning, as if she had ceased worrying about the future of her baby. I am almost certain that a gypsy girl of Naples was Correggio's model. She must have lived somewhere near Vesuvius. I suddenly thought of this the other night when we had the street dancer sent away. She looked back at me with reproachful

eyes. She looked like Zingarella. I should have liked to call her back but in the meantime Zingarella's replica had flown away and left me full of remorse."

We passed through all the galleries and France took leave of his favourites for a few days.

* * * * *

The bells had been mute that morning. The rattles clattered and the museums were closed. Jesus lay in state in all the churches, with candles at His head and flowers all around Him. His waxen image was surrounded by praying men, women and children. The smell of the incense and the hum of the prayer penetrated the streets, which were deserted and devoid of their usual gaiety.

" Look," said France, in front of the tent of a fruit-vendor on the Via Roma, " can you imagine anything more harmonious and artistic than the way that poor huckster has arranged her fruits ? Do you remember having seen a picture with such a garland of oranges and with such an artistic bouquet of flowers ? "

" Ghirlandaio ! " I exclaimed.

" Right. This proves that artistic taste in Italy is more conservative than anywhere else in Europe. This shows that in Ghirlandaio's days the hucksters ornamented their tents in the same way as they are doing now, and that he took their decorations for his models. It is always the simple folk who teach the artists the greatest things."

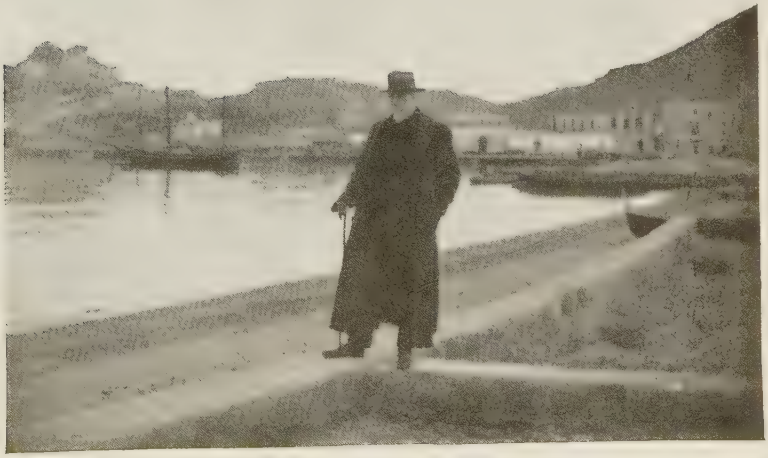
* * * * *

Newsboys were running by. We got out of the way of a tiny donkey cart. The Master made us greet the donkeys and he himself greeted them because in this land where the ancient Latin superstitions are still potent one is expected to perform this act of civility.

We entered a sweet shop. France bought some bonbons, as he said, for us. He always bought sweets for us. The truth was that we did not like sweets and seldom ate them; whereas the Master munched them all day.

On our way home we traversed the Santa Lucia quarter, which smelled of fish. Above us an incredible amount of laundry fluttered in the spring breeze. Children were playing marbles and pretty

FRANCE BUYS SWEETS



FRANCE ON THE SEASHORE

signoras, who were prettier than clean, offered coloured Easter eggs to the passers-by. These eggs were very cheap, scarcely a few *soldi*. One does not know how they can be retailed so cheaply. France would have found this part of the city quite amusing if he had not been troubled by the sight of the lambs with the slashed throats.

" I cannot bear to look at them." He closed his eyes and his cheeks were quite pale. " On the top of everything I always hear those dreadful rattles. How good it would be to hear the metallic sound of the bells over there on the mountainside. I realize now how sad a town can be when its bells are mute and its museums closed."

France was downcast and could not be induced to smile. He talked little, ate almost nothing and, what worried us most, took no interest in anything.

On Easter Day, when we heard the concert of Naples' bells, he was happy again and said :

" I feel that I, too, have risen again."

IX
IN THE CAPITAL OF LOMBARDY

IX

IN THE CAPITAL OF LOMBARDY

ON a mild spring evening we were roaming in the streets of Milan, near the Cathedral. We walked through gently sloping streets where we could look down on the majestic dome of the Cathedral lying at our feet in its awe-inspiring calmness. There was a Verdi festival in the Scala and humanity was swarming around the piazza. A small hill protected us from the crowd. We had taken refuge in this queer mediæval quarter so that we could better concentrate on the art of the forefathers. While we enjoyed the Gothic window paintings, aflame in the reflection of the moon, France talked about the heroic days of a past in which art was a living reality. I learned from him that originally the Cathedral was pure Gothic and that only in later centuries did bunglers introduce some Renaissance into it.

In our ramblings around the square of the Dome he asked me about my impressions. He

liked to tell me the things I did not know. Masterpieces and great achievements made him meditative. The present seemed to him evanescent and unstable. To him it was a coral island in the Ocean of Time, exposed to the waves of the Past and Future. He used to say of himself:

"I shall really be when I shall not be."

In the shadow of the Cathedral, under the enchanting sky of Italy, I asked him:

"Is it true, Master, that we will be ourselves only when we have reached the end of our journey?" And he answered:

"Indeed, it is true. Otherwise our life would not be complete. Death would be missing. The end of the play—the finale."

"Every beginning has an end," even the enduring stones assented.

France commented on the short span of human life and the length of time it took to build a cathedral. Several centuries had to pass before, under the guidance of geniuses, thousands of little human ants, born to work and destroyed by it, could erect so magnificent a structure as the Cathedral of Milan.

"When in Italy," he said, "I am often reminded of the Biblical words, 'Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.' And I may add to this, 'So that thy thoughts may live forever.' For the artist has become dust by the time the verdict of the centuries is passed."

He said the "verdict of the centuries" and not the "verdict of posterity." He was of the opinion that the judgment of man was prejudiced, unreliable, often unjust and even wicked. The judgment of the centuries was different. It made and unmade the artist's reputation, often, it is true, coloured by the whims of passing generations, yet, more unbiased and disinterested than our anæmic critics and those of the coming centuries. Alas, the judgment of ages is not infallible, either.

France walked more slowly and went on with his historical explanations.

"It took humanity more than two centuries to build this Cathedral. It was begun in 1386 and when was it finished? Was it in 1577? No, the main cupola was still missing then."

A pebble rolled down the sloping street. We

looked up and perceived a fat little monk with a round sunburned face and vivacious eyes.

He looked at France with apologizing amiability.

"I have recognized you, Master, from your pictures," he said, "and I am happy to have the opportunity of seeing you."

France shook hands with the little monk. We made friends with him and walked together round the Cathedral in the silvery blue night enthralled by what seemed to us the music of the stones of old Milan. The sky was like the water of Naples Bay when the tiny lights of the fishing boats flash out on the horizon and the pharos casts its light in every direction. The air was balmy and odorous, the whole scene entrancing. France abandoned himself to it completely.

"How invigorating the air is!" said France. "Whenever I feel the joy of living so intensely I am reminded that I tread the soil where Art, Beauty and Divine Epicureanism are prolific."

"Master is in a joking mood," commented the little monk laughingly. "Great men have many

privileges, even teasing a poor monk. Possibly, Italy is 'divinely Epicurean,' but I do not know anything about it. Such things do not penetrate the walls of my monastery."

"*Voyons*," said France, "and when the pretty signoras whisper their sins in your ear don't you ever feel that way?"

The little fellow blushed.

"You know, Master, I must not take notice of such things. Confessions are protected by secrecy."

"I know, but I know likewise that you have to listen to the confession of sin before you can give absolution."

"That is quite different," said the monk, quite perplexed.

Our new friend invited us to see Leonardo da Vinci's "Last Supper" in the dining-room of the monastery. France accepted the invitation and we took a taxi.

We first went to a subterranean chapel of the Monastero Maggiore. We had heard that the faded colours of Luini's "Saint Catherine" ac-

quired new strength by candle-light and we wanted to see it by night.

The monk gave us candles and we passed through a number of chapels, finally stopping before an untidy wall. The flickering light of our candles cast a ghostly yellow on Luini's picture. France immediately began to look for the best position to see the Saint's face. We extinguished our candles so that they should not disturb France in his search. As we stood there almost motionless, only France moving forward, the fine colours of the portrait slowly emerged under the tender light of his candle. Saint Catherine, brought to life by Luini's brush, stood before us.

"It is a perfect Luini," said France, carried away by the painting. "It breathes that indescribable charm for which I like him. Saint Catherine's exquisite face, tragic with suffering, lends itself admirably to his slightly sentimental art."

We were so absorbed in the contemplation of Saint Catherine that we hardly paid any attention to the other pictures. It was moist in the chapel and France complained of feeling unwell. We were

glad when, after being led through another passage, we reached the dining-room of the monks, who were just beginning their supper. The monks, clad in brown, were sitting around a very long table. There were heaps of cheese and *polenta* on the table. France's face expressed disappointment when he saw that Leonardo da Vinci's masterpiece was hidden behind scaffoldings. His customary joviality did not return until the little monk gave orders to have them removed. Then we could see the "Last Supper," which had not been as much restored as we had feared. My first impression of the picture was that the artist had taken the faces of the monks for the models of the apostles and that Christ was Leonardo da Vinci himself. I could not help gazing at the picture for a very long time and heard nothing until our new friend explained that da Vinci was on very good terms with the monks.

"Yet," he said, "this friendship did not prevent them from playing tricks on one another. It was not an easy thing to get along with da Vinci, although he could be enchantingly amiable if he wished to

be. He was a peculiar man who wanted to do things differently from others. He had some very remarkable ideas for his age and his prophecies of future events and discoveries must have startled his monk friends. My friends here are convinced that almost all his prophecies have been fulfilled, although in some cases it took centuries to realize them. Leonardo da Vinci painted the quarrelling monks of his day. The real name of his Judas was Nicodemus, with whom he quarrelled most often. He used to say that Nicodemus was an enemy of his art, a traitor to the traditions of the Renaissance."

In this way we learned from our friend that the Christ we saw on the wall was Leonardo da Vinci in body, although, doubtless, the many restorations have somewhat changed his features.

After a further analysis of the picture France expressed dissatisfaction with the repairs. He pointed out to the monks, who stood around him and listened with great interest, some exceptionally gross mistakes. He conceded, however :

" Not even the bungling artisans could destroy its perfect lines. The calmness pervading the

picture is impressive. One hears Him say, ' Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray Me.' One feels the surprise and uneasiness of the apostles. Judas—we may call him Friar Nicodemus—is a powerful portrait. Our friend says that da Vinci and the friar were not the best of friends, according to appearances. If we are to believe the testimony of this picture, da Vinci was a real friend of the poor monk whom we see in the picture shuddering and haunted by cruel doubts. In the sincerity of his remorse he was a true disciple of Jesus. The other apostles—or monks—are marvellously human, too. They are like so many shadows flitting through the universe and carrying with them untold aspirations and faded hopes. Every face on the picture expresses the foreboding : ' You will be dead and your life eternal will not help you to live.' "

X
IN THE CITY OF THE MORTADELLAS

X

IN THE CITY OF THE MORTADELLAS

THE next day we left Milan for Bologna. On this occasion Anatole France wished to rest as he was not feeling well. "We will just ramble about aimlessly," he said, "and make nasty remarks about our neighbours. We shall behave as regular tourists, looking at things in a desultory manner and doing nothing."

This, in fact, we did, with some modifications. Soon after our arrival in Bologna, France ate some of its famous *mortadellas*, which upset his stomach. No wonder that he was nauseated with everything he saw, especially with the pictures of Guido Reni. He had never liked Reni.

In order to amuse him we took a ride that afternoon. He said that he was most anxious to avoid seeing any more Guido Reni pictures and did not know how he could gratify his desire. I suggested that we might go to the well-known cemetery of Bologna.

" Very well," France consented, " let us go there. It is in the cemetery that we can get away from the disconcerting things of life."

" Not even there," I objected, " just think of the graves you have called monuments of bad taste."

" Well, if there is no solace for our aching heart we will do as the smiling Greek philosopher did and smile at the sad things of life."

That was what we did in the cemetery of Bologna against our wish. It was some of the inscriptions on the gravestones which made us smile. I will reproduce a few of them, not because they are " funny," but because they are typical of man's vanity.

" This is the resting-place," ran one of the inscriptions, " of M., the innkeeper, who was rich and respected. He left behind three daughters with large dowries and a widow who will remain faithful to his memory forever." Above the inscription there was the picture of a fat, be-moustached man.

Another inscription ran :

" In this expensive tomb is buried N., the

architect. If death had not called him away he would have erected many more buildings. His two maiden sisters are mourning him and entreat heaven for consolation."

While I was making stenographic notes France remarked quietly :

" I wonder whether these inscriptions serve as marriage advertisements."

Now it was France who took the initiative in looking for the extraordinary inscriptions. We also had become interested in some of the pictures pasted on the stones. " Look," said France, " there is a basketful of fruit on this grey marble. Above it there are two doves kissing each other. This is the inscription : ' When I lived I sold fruit. I shall now sit at God's right for I loved my husband and have made much money for him. May he be faithful to me after my death.' There is a certain naïve charm in this. Here is another one. Red willows on white stones. At first I thought the branches were full of birds. I notice now that they are shoes ; small and large, men's and women's. ' Here lies Giovanni, the shoemaker. He had made

more shoes than there are reproduced here. Yet his wife deserted him for a drunkard. He had this stone of female betrayal erected above his dust. From this may people learn how to protect themselves."

We sympathized with the fruit-vendor and the shoemaker. In the burial place of the distinguished dead we did not find anything which appealed to us. Instead, we found unbearable luxury and bad taste. Most of the graves were alabaster or granite, tattooed with inartistic drawings. Some of the graves were all ablaze with glittering tin wreaths and imitation pearls. Artificial flowers, too, were much in evidence. The inscriptions were not as pathetic as those of the simpler men. In this part of the cemetery the dead were described by their titles and ranks as if, even beyond the grave, they wanted to be in a separate class.

When we passed the gate of the cemetery, France looked back and remarked :

" I believe that these people liked the *mortadella* and Guido Reni's pictures."

XI
THE CHARMS OF PARMA

XI

THE CHARMS OF PARMA

WE were sitting on the balcony of our hotel in Parma enjoying the colours of the twilight. From the Corso Vittorio Emanuele, which bisects lovely Parma, built like a round apple, the music of Italian life was wafted to us. It was like a cradle song to those who wanted to dream. On such nights it was lovely to listen to the reminiscences of the Master, speaking to himself rather than to us. He spoke of his mother, whom he loved with all the intensity of deep affection. He liked to recall her simplicity, kindness and wisdom and how all these qualities were blended harmoniously in her. His words sounded to me like the psalms of King David and I saw his mother, radiant with ethereal bliss. Kindness was her only adornment, as she stood before me, the dazzling beauty of her smile contrasting sharply with the simplicity of her grey dress.

" In my childhood," he said, looking back into

the past, " my mother cured me of all my ills. As long as she lived I had a place of refuge from the vicissitudes of life. Even after she died I was guided by her wisdom. I felt that she forgave my little offences as she used to do when she took me on her lap, consoling and caressing me. I have been looking in many a woman, since, for her simplicity, kindness and wisdom. In gratitude to my mother I have respected every woman and tried to understand her. Although most of those whom I have met have been different in many respects, yet, I have found in some of them the qualities characteristic of her. However, I do not want to say that they had no other qualities as well. Notwithstanding our efforts to know humanity we find that it is a mystery. Women are much more mysterious than men. Many of them cannot tell the truth, even if they want to. They do not know how to be sincere. And if some of them do succeed in being frank, so much the worse for them because one does not believe them. It is only their lies which men believe. Whose fault is it ? I do not know.

" The intelligence of the woman is very high

and she is ready to go to all extremes in asserting herself. More than the man she is aware of the age in which she lives because she carries it within herself. In our search for the history of the past it is the woman who shows us the way. It is she who makes us forsee the future—it is the woman, heroic, sentimental, romantic, emancipated, independent. She was taken from Adam's breast, near his heart, brought to life by his ardent desire. How could she be anything else but his image ? Therefore the woman's destiny depends on the man."

I commented :

" Master remarked that a woman's fate depended on man. I should be insincere if I failed to admit that this is true. On the other hand, life's continuity postulates that it should be complete. It is she who bears, feeds and educates him, who teaches him how to kiss and who often stands at his death-bed. Life's completeness thus requires that the existence of the male should depend on the female. A compromise solution would be to say that the lives of man and woman are one from the

day of creation. Since their existence is due to their union, how can you separate their destinies? Their lives were welded together by the primal act of creation. There is no escape from the recognition of this fact. They go through life together. If you bisect the circle all there is left is a semicircle, which is the negation of life. Man's and woman's destiny is mutual. It is packed with sadness from creation until death. One's mother, sister, lover, or to use Biblical names, Maria and Veronica, make man's life complete."

"You are right," admitted France. "You trapped me the same way as when I explained God from His non-existence. I confess that I am an infidel, a poor sinner, who believes as fervently and altruistically as most infidels do. I bow my head and declare solemnly that woman is man's destiny. You see what an obstinate cynic I am. Maria and Veronica are beautiful Biblical creations. But I like blonde Magdalene even better than the others, because she reminds me that Christianity has done most for woman by declaring love sinful."

Maria and Veronica made me mention the lines of Ady, the great Hungarian poet :

" From Maria to Veronica
Man's arm is our destiny."

We caught ourselves talking again about Ady.

" I can visualize him," said France, " that strong, battle-worn man. His face remains in one's memory. I have always liked to look at his picture on your mantelpiece. His dark hair is like the flapping wings of a night bird. It flows down over his diabolical eyes. I have never seen so savage and yet, so mild-looking eyes. It is genius that is glowing in them. Those eyes shocked me when I first looked at them, they seemed so barbarous and wild. Later, they became more familiar, even intimate. I believe I would have missed them if you had removed the picture. I remember having asked you to do so once. You were reading Baudelaire, whom, you said, you wanted me to like as much as you did. As I was anxious to have his genius come to me from different sources and through different interpretations I did not tell you that he has been my favourite for a long time. It was then that the

eyes of your Ady, which looked at me sardonically, disturbed me and I asked you to remove his picture from the mantelpiece. I thought that your 'barbarian' should not intrude when we were enjoying one of our greatest masters. Instead of removing it you brought the picture nearer to me. You forced me to make his acquaintance, at least spiritually. 'He is the only living poet who ranks equal with Baudelaire,' you exclaimed. I knew that you rated Baudelaire higher than myself. Do not try to contradict me! Somebody once mentioned Baudelaire and immediately afterwards made reference to my 'Les Noces Corinthiennes,' and I saw a shadow passing over your forehead. What could I do under such circumstances? We promoted Ady to a place nearer Baudelaire. Was it not so?"

He stood up and leaned over the balustrade.

"How beautiful the sky is to-night," he said. "I would like to see the Hungarian sky under which you were reared and gaze upon the blue Danube and Mount Gellért, from which the heathens hurled a bishop into the Danube. Men are always fighting and torturing each other

because of their ideas, their religion. They do not want to solve their problems intelligently and in the fulness of the little wisdom which is theirs." He sat back in his chair and continued :

" I am grateful to you for having made me acquainted with this barbarian bard whose soul has been sleeping a thousand years."

In the solemn tranquillity of the night I translated several Ady poems for France. I described to him Transylvania, where Ady was born and reared. My attempt at an extemporaneous translation seemed to be successful because France remarked : " It is touching how he fights with himself, with his age, and everything that he loves and that turns against him. We all try to do the same thing." He promised that he would write an essay about Ady.

When we bade each other good-night, after having talked about many things that were dear to us, he remarked once more :

" Your poet, Ady, is a rebellious and impatient spirit, who, in spite of his fighting temperament, is a lover of peace."

The next day we took a cab to the Public Garden of Parma. France liked its trees, flowers, and its sunshine. Thence we went to the Museum and spent most of our time in the Correggio Gallery. France found great pleasure in looking at the " Madonna in the Stable " and the " Flight from Egypt."

" How exquisite is its green ! " he exclaimed when he noticed the " Madonna," " and how clear the radiance of the sky, which gives lustre to the earth and greater importance to the figures ! Mary's face is as charming as that of Correggio's ' Madonna ' in Naples. Do you remember her graceful gesture as she holds a hare on her lap ? The oftener I look at Correggio the greater is my admiration for him. The art of this great master is steeped in the atmosphere of Parma. What a delightful place to rest ! "

We bade Parma good-bye, taking along a basket of violets, the favourite flowers of the Parmese.

XII
IN THE TOWN OF THE RED LILY

XII

IN THE TOWN OF THE RED LILY

FOR days it had been raining incessantly, but when we reached Florence the clouds had vanished and the smiling blue of the Italian sky was flirting with us. We stopped on the Ponte Vecchio and looked at the swirling clay-coloured water of the Arno. On both banks the small red-tiled houses seemed to shrink from the racing eddies. Anatole France took pity on them.

" In a disaster it is mostly the poor people who suffer," he said. " It is pathetic how those two ramshackle houses facing the Uffizi seem to tremble above the roaring water. They must be inhabited by poverty-stricken people. Perhaps they are old, too, or out of employment."

He looked compassionately at the dilapidated old houses.

" We will come here every day," he continued, " and if we find that the situation is further aggravated we shall take them to our hotel. We

will have the little *bambini* bathed if there are not too many, and if we do not have enough money we will go begging for them."

France was always moved to compassion by the pathetic impotence of poverty. "One needs more honesty to bear poverty than rich people can understand," he said.

We slowly passed through the Ponte Vecchio, stealing occasional glances at the display windows which skirt both sides of the bridge.

On the other side of the bridge, in front of the statue of Benvenuto Cellini, we looked back.

"The bridges in mediæval Paris were like this one," remarked France. "It is a spectacle for the gods to look at Dante's birthplace from this bridge. The imposing cupolas and slender campaniles are like islets and light towers in the sea of the *palazzi*. This town is worthy of Dante, the Divino. It contains so many treasures that one has to return here over and over again, in order to assimilate the host of impressions asking for admittance to one's consciousness. Those who are not moderate and want to sip too much of the pleasures concentrated

in this chosen town of Italy may soon become nauseated with so much beauty."

Near the Mercato Vecchio we passed through gloomy arcades until we reached the Piazza della Signoria and the Palazzo Vecchio, which was once the seat of the government of the Republic.

The sun bathed the town in gold and chased the white clouds behind the hills of Tuscany. The Palazzo Vecchio, in the beauty of its stone symphony, defied the Florentine sky-line. Its campanile looked like a bas-relief carved in the elusive Italian air of transcendent glory.

" It has its beauty," said France, " in spite of the lack of architectural co-ordination and a large dose of artistic savagery. Our friend, President Brosses, whose book we are reading in our leisured time, was mistaken when he described it as an old bastile surmounted by a horrible tower. But let us forgive his mistake, since he was an historian and archæologist. Both types of scientists are interesting mostly in their mistakes, on which they thrive and to which most of them owe their successes. Our pleasure should not be galled by the prejudices of

Monsieur Brosses and by his, often distorted, views of the past century. Besides, he achieved things which caused his rejection by the Academy."

We bought a few etchings and took a good look at the Fountain of Neptune. France liked its architecture and its Tritons. On this glorious May day we read on a bronze slab that on a day of May 1498, Savonarola, the rebel monk, who had defied the Pope and cried his heretic profession of faith to an indolent world, was burned alive here amidst the jeers of the crowd.

" Let us go now to the terrace of the Loggia dei Lanzi," said France, " and let us look at Donatello's ' Judith ' and Cellini's ' Perseus.' From there we can go to the Uffizi. Immersion into art is the best way for me to disburden myself of harassing thoughts." The bronze slab again reminded us of human cruelty. " Wherever one goes, monuments and tombstones, memorial tablets and slabs, announce to us that man has always been persecuting and killing man for his thoughts, his convictions, for the things he loved and for the things he disliked, for his loyalty, and for his purest sentiments.

On such occasions I always begin to despair of humanity. I am afraid of a new cruel war. I do not think it can be avoided unless we can count on the wisdom of man. But is there really any wisdom in man when he acts collectively? It is not the sage who guides us through this blundering existence. In this town where there are so many mementos of humanity's past I feel concerned, more than usual, about humanity's future. Let us therefore steep ourselves in beauty, so that it may soothe our nerves. We will listen to the bells announcing peace and not to the rumbling of cannon."

France was unhappy most of the time we spent in Florence. I felt that the memories of his youth were haunting him. It was in Florence that he had been really happy and not in the exclusive house of the Villa Saïd. It was here that he had really lived and had his first battle with the forces which checked the creative energies of his genius. In this town he had become articulate and had been anointed the high-priest of Art and Beauty.

Like humble pilgrims we visited museums and churches. In the evening we reviewed what we had

seen during the day. France seldom went out after sunset. We liked to sit on the balcony of our rooms, if the weather were favourable, or in his drawing-room musing over his manuscript. He was tireless in revising it. Every word had to have not only its significance but also its music. After France went to bed I jotted down my impressions of the day.

To-night he talked about Donatello.

"When we see his creations in bronze or marble," he said, "we are struck by his immense knowledge and the delicacy of his sentiments. His knowledge of antiquity does not make him a slave of traditions, although he has a tendency to become addicted to exaggerated accurateness, the mortal enemy of the real artist. Donatello is a man of extremes, uneven, never content with his achievements, a real genius. He is often uncouth, even savage, as in his conception of Saint John. Sometimes he finds the most graceful expression for beauty, as in his 'David.'"

We looked long at some Donatello reproductions, "The Bald Man," "Saint George,"

FRANCE WITH DR. COUCHOUD IN FRONT OF THE CHURCH SANTA MARIA NOVELLA, NAPLES

" Judith," and the equestrian statue of " Gattamelata," the famous Paduan condottiere.

When we had discussed everything we knew about Donatello we turned to Giotto. France liked to talk about Dante's friend.

" His father was a peasant," he said, " and brought up his sons as peasants. Tending his sheep when ten years old, little Giotto began to make drawings in the sand and on stones. One day Cimabue happened to come his way and noticed the child deeply absorbed in artistic work. He stopped in amazement, and as at that time professional jealousy was yet unknown, he asked the child if he should like to learn how to paint. As Cimabue's disciple, aided by his natural gifts and the excellent teaching of his master, Giotto soon surpassed the official painter of Madonnas and angels, who was shackled to the rigid Byzantine traditions. The peasant boy antedated his age by many centuries. He painted living models and nature not as he had been taught to see them but as he actually saw the world. His courage, coupled with

persistency, brought him success, which Dante, his friend, expresses thus:

"'Cimabue thought to hold the field in painting, and now Giotto has the cry, so that the fame of him is obscured.'"

One night, contrary to our custom, we stayed out late. We had been following the trail of Dante on the banks of the Arno. We had our dinner in a small café, among poor people, after which we visited the Casa Dante on the Via Dante. It was a dilapidated old house. The projecting barred windows of the first floor gave it a Turkish appearance. Well-meaning amateurs had heaped together in the house a great number of insignificant Dante relics. We could not believe that Dante had been born in this house.

Disappointed, we headed toward the Baptistery, where Dante was baptised. It cowers on a small square by the side of the Cathedral. France remarked that before it was rebuilt it had been a heathen place of worship most likely dedicated to Mars, the god of war. Evidently, Mars liked to stay in Florence even after he had been dethroned,

as fact attests that the town of the Red Lily had been the scene of a great number of external and internal warfares.

" I envy the artist," commented France, bending over the gate of Ghiberti's bronze heaven, " who can give his imagination free play. The artist here proudly proclaims, ' I was given perfect liberty to do as I liked.' For that reason he did his work merrily and with abandon. How sunny is his heaven with its typical Florentine trees and men ! The faces of the blessed are as jovial and shrewd as the faces of the burghers of those days must have been. The episodes taken from the New Testament show us more vividly how fifteenth century Florence was than any other contemporary record we possess. They show the high officials of Ghiberti's age as well as the simple folk, the judges and the notaries, the monks and the soldiers. With diabolical skill he stamped on the faces of some of them the marks of their characters, their stupidity, greed, and cruelty. Their faces are distorted into a sardonic smile ; they are suffering or, in the hours of relief, they give themselves to licentiousness and

debauchery. For twenty-four years Ghiberti was working on these gates, meditating deeply, and profoundly interested. He rose every morning eager to pour his soul forth on the surface of a tiny speck of space, which was his daily contribution to immortality. The real artist needs much time. His emotions must mature and every moment must be for him the beginning and end of all things, creation out of nothing, grasping the meaning of a chord of Life's great symphony."

After having looked at the stone cistern where Dante was baptised we continued our ramblings around the Duomo, reading the stories told by the old stones. We were looking for an old stone, edged in a wall, on which the rain of many centuries has fallen. Finally we found it. It bore the inscription "*Il Sasso di Dante.*" According to the legend, Dante used to rest upon it in the late evenings of the summer. France wiped the perspiration from his forehead. He looked long at the stone, whose gray seemed to be all aglow. France had a religion; it was Art. And now he was in a temple of his religion, his head uncovered, the Italian sky

the cupola of his place of worship and a rough-hewn stone its high altar.

In the café where we had our dinner the following night we looked searchingly at the simple folk sitting at the cross-legged tables. We compared their features, gestures and poses with the portraits we had seen in the museums of Florence. France liked to listen to what the artisan and merchants of the poet's birthplace were talking about. They were Dante's countrymen.

It was late at night—at least late for us—when we were still walking about Mercato Vecchio, talking about statues and paintings, art and artists.

Florence reminded me of France's " Red Lily " and especially of a charming character, the poet Choulette, who once complained bitterly that he had lost his sewing utensils in a room of the Pitti. In a conversation with Miss Bell, Choulette told of himself :

" I write my poems when patching my pants and while sweeping my room I sing them. That is why the common people like my songs. Folk songs

are prettier than mine although they are not as natural."

I asked France whether he portrayed Verlaine in the poet.

"Yes," he said meditatingly, "Choulette is Verlaine. Although it was not easy to get along with him on account of his eccentricities and grumblings, I was very fond of him. His sense of justice was so great that I had to like him."

The small streets and old houses always brought the poet to mind. France said it was an "obsession" with him to think of Dante when he was in Florence.

"This town exiled all its great men," he said, "from Dante to Cellini, or they left it voluntarily to go to places where there was more freedom and peace. No one, however, missed Florence as much as Dante. He had left here the dreams of his youth, the scene of his first wrestlings with the giants who always watch the men of genius and try to keep them fast in the mud of the earth when they crave to soar to heights where eternity welcomes them . . . I feel. . . I cannot help feeling that Dante

trod these stones. He walked here with Giotto! *What* were they talking about?"

* * * * *

We took leave of Florence in the Boboli Garden. We took leave of the flowers and the two old cyprus trees, six hundred years old.

"How many storms must have been raging over their crowns," remarked France, caressing their decaying trunks. "They have to be protected in their old age. How human is the fate of the trees!"

We looked back at the garden from the upper terrace. Neptune's statue looked haughty in the distance, as if he wanted to vent his rage on the waves. The Tritons with their graceful curves leaned against the rocks on which their master stood. The water swirled up from the round basin and fell back, foaming.

The sun was slowly setting. The trees, bushes and flowers were glowing on the green of the lawn. The marble statues among the dense foliage seemed to have come to life. Giovanni de Bologna's "Venus" appeared to be craving a chilling bath and turned wistfully toward the fountain. The air

was fragrant with a spicy odour. The garden was full of the animation preceding the nightfall. But we no longer saw the garden. Our eyes were fascinated by an even more beautiful picture, we saw Florence in the light of the setting sun. The colours on the palette of the sky—they were the colours of the Florence school—were of a baffling variety. The iron ring of the Arno, which bisects the town, gave the whole picture a mysteriously mellow note. The fresh green of the cupolas had turned purple, and the grey of the campanile had become rosy. The *palazzos* and, dominating them, the Cathedral were trembling in an orgy of colour. The spring atmosphere enveloped the purple glow in a delicate green and blue. On the horizon the Tuscan hills were drawing nearer the city as the rays of the sun struck them. On one of them two slender women were approaching a third. They met on the crest of a hill, they grew in the distorting perspective of the sunset and their silhouette became more distinct on the eastern sky. They were graceful and supple, the living " Three Graces " of Botticelli.

XIII
VERONA, THE REFUGE OF DANTE

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VERONA, THE REFUGE OF DANTE

ABSORBED in his thoughts, Anatole France crossed the noisy Piazza delle Erbe with measured gait. He did not even look at the ancient mansions of the square, and neglected to make sardonic remarks about the gesticulating passers-by. I followed him without saying a word, merely observing the changes on his face.

"You notice," he said, "that it is still Dante who haunts my thoughts." We emerged from a small street and remarked, in front of us, the statue of the Divino. "Here he is again," exclaimed France with a tired smile. "We will just sit down here facing him, although the sun will be against us."

Thus spoke the Master and we took our places at a round table of a small café. The waiter brought us lemonade while we inspected the statue. France regretted that it was made by Ugo Zannoni, a mediocre sculptor.

"People ought to insist," he commented, "in

countries where art is sacred that the Ministers of Arts be artists of recognised standing."

Pretty women with fiery eyes and babies in arms passed by. A soldier greeted us politely and a fruit-vendor offered oranges. A small child demanded macaroni with his dirty little paws outstretched. Then, when the noon-bells struck, a sudden calm ensued. Our neighbours left and we remained alone in the company of historic palaces —as if in a stone cage. I regarded the Palazzo Tribunalizio, where once had lived Can Signorio Della Scala, *podesta*, and captain of the people. A small slab commemorates his life. On one side the palazzo fronts us on a queer street held together by Roman arches on the level of the first floor. In this environment of mediæval charm the passers-by seemed to form a part of a moving picture. They were small and insignificant against the background of the large quadrangular campanile. The myopic windows of that sombre tower betrayed that originally it was a prison. I could not help thinking of the unfortunate victims whom the noble family of Scaligeri had chained to the bars, some-

times for no reason at all except personal rancour, and of those tiny windows through which the sun's rays seldom shone into their cells.

The sun emerged from behind the clouds, where it had been playing hide and seek and flooded the Piazza dei Signori with its light. A swarm of doves settled on Dante's head and shoulders. France, who had finished taking a few notes, took a handful of biscuits, which, after crushing, he threw to the doves. The birds of Venus beat with their wings, hurled themselves on the crumbs and devoured them instantly. When nothing remained they fought one another for the pleasure of fighting and practice.

The arrival of three ragged children in bellicose spirits put an end to their quarrel. France gave the rest of the biscuits to the boys, who were no less gluttonous than the birds. When they had become too aggressive he sent them on their way, not without difficulty.

"Their instincts make them resemble the animals," said France, rather bored. "I readily admit, however, that their faults are inherent in

creation, for which they are not responsible. Why were they created like this? No doubt, because Demiurgus made them in his own image."

Somewhere a window was opened and the voice of a young girl, singing a sentimental song with great waste of vocal energy, pierced the calm air.

"This song is a hymn of love," remarked France. "We eat and love and work a little. That is human life."

"And what of immortality, Master? What of Dante?"

"Dante? . . . He had to do what he did and pay the penalty with intolerable suffering. He felt all the bitterness of existence in this great gaol, life, which fettered him to clumsy matter. The price of immortality is high. Those who attain it—and their number is indeed small—pass through hell and purgatory before they reach what they think is their paradise to find it full of deceptions and cruel disappointments. Dante, our Divino. He had to put up with many things during his life of scarcely more than half a century. A few of its incidents were a great sad love for Beatrice, his

work full of torturing doubts, his marriage with Gemma, daughter of Manetto Donate, which was not very happy, exile, illness and death in Ravenna, away from his beloved Florence. Did he not pay a high price for immortality? In addition to all this, grateful posterity erected in his honour this awful statue by an inartistic artist."

A boy traversed the square whistling the air of Aïda. An old man, with a basket on his arm, encouraged a heavily laden mule to go faster. Two priests emerged from the palace of the Scaligeri, which is to-day the Prefecture and vanished in the street leading to the Piazza delle Erbe.

The glance of France was absorbed for a moment in contemplation of the palace from which the two priests had come and then, at my request, he told its history:

"Built under Mastino, in 1272, nothing has remained of the old building or of the part which was erected under Alberto, his brother and successor. There may be something left of the work of restoration ordered by Can Francesco, known as Can Grande, who had the walls decorated with

Giotto's frescos: the portraits of Uguccione della Faggiuola, the imperial vicar in Genoa, and other famous men of that epoch. This old palazzo, rebuilt and restored may times, reminds one of poor Divino. Dante, before he was exiled, had often visited Verona under Bartolomeo, son of Alberto. Later, when an outlaw, he found refuge in this palace, where he enjoyed the protection of his powerful friends, the Scaligeri. He often came to this charming town when Can Grande was its *podesta*. Those days were favourable for art and literature. Can Grande had a brilliant court where Dante often saw his friends, Giotto, the painter and Albertino Mussato, the dramatist."

We left our table in the café.

"Let us take a closer look," suggested France.

We entered its yard, richly ormamented with Roman arches. France stopped in front of the staircase.

"Although they have been restored several times, nevertheless, they resemble the stairs of which Dante sang:

"'. . . sa di sale
Lo pane altrui, e como e duro calle
Lo scendere e il slair per l'altrui scale. . . .'"

When we passed under the arch of the gate France remarked with a sad smile:

"He must have passed here many times. The walls of this palace afforded him protection. Yet he was not happy although safe from persecution. He admitted this in the lines which I have just quoted. Never and nowhere was he happy. He was the light which serves others and consumes itself. What he had here was a temporary relief from the nervous tension of an outlaw's life. Hence Verona is the refuge of the Divino."

* * * * *

The same afternoon, when the sun was most lavish with its rays, we made a long trip in and around the town. We visited the historic gates of Verona, the ruins of the Villa of Catullus, the church of Saint Zeno, the grave in which, the legend says, Juliet is buried and the house of her parents on the Via Capello. Then we went to the palaces built by San Michele, the Veronese architect and military

engineer. France always said that they were his favourites in Verona. We slowly walked down the Corso Cavour, enjoying every creation of San Michele. Each time he saw the houses France discovered some new beauty which had escaped his attention. We looked for the San Michele houses in every nook and corner of old Verona and we found and enjoyed them. Although France liked them all, his favourite was the Palazzo Canossa, which we visited most often. He found its architecture of an extraordinary purity, possessing in the highest measure the harmony of proportions. The entablature and the cornices lent a particular grace to its subtle gravity. In the fulness of his admiration France exclaimed :

" This palace, in addition to the virtues of the others, has many more distinguishing marks. Its elegance and the simplicity of its lines, its expressiveness and the naturalness of its conceptions, make it stand out among all architectural creations. When building this house San Michele surpassed himself. It gives the eyes a rest and makes one's thoughts gather creative momentum."

FRANCE AT THE CHURCH OF SAN ZENO, VERONA

In Verona, France assembled material industriously. What his plans were he did not say. Mostly he had no premeditated plans. Suddenly an idea would come to him and he would feel that he had to elaborate it. Although a radical by political conviction, he was an aristocrat in literature. Instead of " selling " his thoughts to the *profanum vulgus*, he would have liked to keep them in the virginal purity of the hidden recesses of his brains.

XIV
IN THE FOREST OF DANTE

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IN THE FOREST OF DANTE

WE had come to Dante's forest to forget that "*vanitas vanitatum et omnia vanitas.*" We sat on the ground : Anatole France and his two pupils, Doctor Couchoud and I. There was nobody near us. Our driver was fast asleep in his cab. The calm was absolute and only what seemed to us the rhythmical beating of the pulse of Life reached us through the branches of the pines. We had the impression that we were holding our hands on the pulse of Time and Life. As in a vision we saw the Past and had a foreboding of the Future.

Beyond the canal mottled cows were grazing in the grass of the swampy meadow. The sleepy sound of their bells beat against the trunks of the trees. Torn clouds were wandering across the sky. They, too, appeared to graze, like huge lambs. My thoughts were with them as they chased each other, ever changing and imperceptible. Somewhere in a distance the sea grumbled with loud dissatis-

faction, then calmed down with a stifled sob and started up again with impetuous roaring. It raged and grew calm in pleasing rhythm.

Was it a storm that was brewing or had Orpheus come from the Inferno to play on his harp for us ?

Crying and diabolically merry with laughter, stifled sighs and impetuous roarings tore their way across the voice of the water and the breeze.

" Even the sounds of the sea and of the wind are different here," said France, " in this forest of the ' Divine Tuscan.' It is possible that it was here that the great visionary of hell had his first inspiration amid the ghostly shadows of the trees. The Great Unknown makes one shudder here. We feel that it is no use to know the Certain, which is Nothing. We must strive to know the Impossible, which is Something. Crushed by the realization of our nothingness, we are tortured by infernal suffering. We are impotent in this universe, more so in our contact with our fellowmen than with Nature. We cannot make ourselves understood by one another. We are always alone, but most so when we suffer and when in doubt. We are as much alone as

IN "DANTE'S FOREST"

FRANCE, DR. PAUL-LOUIS COUCHOUD, AND MME. BOLONI

Dante was when roaming in this forest, or when Lord Byron was when riding headlong among the shadows of the shadows which were always on his trail."

We did not move, anxious to avoid disturbing him in his meditation. The sun hurled a wave of heat toward us. The cricket was playing its monotonous music in the grass. It suddenly occurred to me that we were in a cemetery—Ravenna—the cemetery of mortal greatness and fallen empires. Besides Dante's tomb here was the grave of King Odoacer and of the Western Roman Empire. Here were buried also the Eastern Gothic Empire of Theodoric and the Kingdom of the Lombards. The tiny crickets were chirping over a great past. How Time had swept men and things out of its way! I was lost in my thoughts as I faced the *Citta Dolenta* glittering in the blue air. What luxury, blood and orgies its walls had seen. What horrors and crimes had been committed in Ravenna during the reign of the Borgias.

The sound of the sea, the breeze among the trees, the song of birds and the chirping of the

cricket brought to mind a few famous stanzas which Dante addressed to Francesca, the beautiful daughter of Guido Polenta, the tyrant of Ravenna. Then again I remembered that every foot of ground in Ravenna saw the making of world history. Here Venice achieved supremacy. Here the French and the armies of the Pope fought one of the bloodiest battles of the early sixteenth century. Far in the distance a white marble Renaissance column proclaimed that it was there that Gaston de Foix, the " child " generalissimo of Louis XII, fell at the head of the French army, when he was twenty-one years of age. I had seen France in the morning light standing, deeply moved, in front of the memorial column. Although he was not a " patriot " in the current sense of the word, he was proud of the achievements of his country. My thoughts were wandering far afield.

France touched my shoulder with his finger.

" We have been silent for a long time. So many things occur to us in the forest of Dante. His sadness is on our trail. We think of the vanity of all things, the sufferings of existence and the horror

NEAR RAVENNA

THE MEMORIAL STONE IN HONOR OF GASTON DE FOIX

ANATOLE FRANCE IN "DANTE'S FOREST"

of decay. Let us not abandon ourselves to melancholic thoughts. Besides Dante's ghost, Boccaccio's spirit must be romping somewhere here with the fairies of the forest."

He looked teasingly at his young physician, Doctor Couchoud.

"Now we will tell each other what we were thinking about. It is your turn, dear Couchoud. We would like to hear you."

"Although I do not scorn the stories of Boccaccio," the doctor answered, "I am thinking now of something quite different. You remember the white lambs of the 'Good Shepherd,' a mosaic on the tomb of Galla Placidia, the earliest building in Ravenna, behind the chapel San Vitale. I think it the most harmonious composition of primitive Christendom. You recollect the Good Shepherd in the centre of the picture and three lambs on both sides. In the background there is a hill shimmering in a bluish green light, a hill of womanly charm, as you call these graceful elevations of the Italian countryside. To the left there is a moss-covered stone tablet. The background of

trees and grass gives added charm to the lambs. I almost hear the bell around the neck of their leader inducing them to come nearer to one another, until their snow-white fleeces become a mass of cloud. Above all this is a Roman arch which imparts the glory of a rainbow to the landscape, man and beast. The beautiful colours have their own language. I am still under the spell of this mosaic which we saw this morning. I shall jealously guard the memory of my first impression of its transcendent beauty."

" Does the beauty of the mosaic make you forget, my dear Couchoud," said France, " that it adorns the grave of Galla Placidia ? Does it not make you remember the sad history of an unfortunate empress ? To Ravenna, which, once upon a time, was a city of lagoons, the Emperor Honorius had fled from the hordes of barbarians who were heading straight towards Rome. Honorius was immensely rich and though he did not wish to offend the native population of Ravenna, which was poverty-stricken, by displaying his treasures, nevertheless his gorgeous attire caused much stir and

widespread dissatisfaction. He was betrayed by a group of disgruntled plebeians and Alaric with his Gothic hordes swooped down on Ravenna. They took the emperor's beautiful sister, Galla Placidia, as a hostage. You can well imagine what the fate of an attractive hostage was in the hands of the Goths. In spite of her opposition, Ataulf, Alaric's brother-in-law and later king of the Goths, married her in Narbonne. The possession of so beautiful a woman did not tame Ataulf, who, after his marriage, continued his reckless adventures. He met his fate in Barcelona at the hands of an assassin. How Galla Placidia got back to Ravenna we do not know. She returned to Ravenna, where she is buried and the mosaic of ' The Good Shepherd ' is above her ashes."

While France spoke about ancient Ravenna and the sad story of the emperor's sister I could not help visualizing the modern city.

At first one is struck by the predominance of commonplace houses. The streets are small-town thoroughfares resounding with the staccato noise of Italian life. It is in the centre, around the

Piazza Vittorio Emanuele, that there is some trace of city life. Bersaglieri officers are talking in stentorian voices around a green table. Occasionally an automobile makes its way across the crowd, which is very slow to give it the right of way.

In the maze of small streets one finds some difficulty in finding the way. On many corners beggars are lounging, some of whom have the air of being extremely happy. They have developed an art in doing nothing.

It is only slowly and after patient search that one comes across Ravenna's real treasures, dating back fifteen centuries. Edged in between modern buildings, the sharp eye discerns old churches with round Roman towers and impressive arches. We find the tomb of Galla Placidia, the church of San Vitale which has the most exquisitely shaped arch doors and windows. If one is alert enough one may find S. Apollinare Nuovo and the ruins of Theodoric's palace. Having acquired the habit of discovering antiquities, one finds them even in the most hidden places. Often we were delighted to see stone masterpieces beneath the hedges of decay-

ing gardens. Here was a crumbling column, there the remnant of a garden. We came across mossy fountains of the tenth century and richly ornamented old stones of Dante's time. Ravenna displayed her treasures to us.

A green lizard which sped by made us shudder.

"A little beast had to bring us to consciousness," said France laughingly. "What is the matter with you, children? You do not seem to be yourselves. Ravenna and Dante's forest have plunged you into profound thoughts. You do not seem to care what I am saying. When I shall not be here any longer, I am certain you will think of me!"

He told this with charming apprehension. Yet, it made us feel uneasy as we looked at his pale face and snow-white head. He noticed our shock.

"We are not going to be sentimental," he said. "We have to resign ourselves to the decision of the Fates. In order to dismiss sad thoughts I will talk to you about the large mosaics of the San Vitale, 'Justinian and Theodora,'"

His face lit up. He enjoyed speaking about this subject.

"Well, those mosaics, beneath gilt Byzantian arches, surrounded by a splendour that blinds the eyes—what adjectives shall I use? That is where you are great." This he addressed to me with a twinkle in his eye. "I have learned from you to be lavish with adjectives. You do not mind my saying so. It is quite natural that our enthusiasm should occasionally find expression in solemn words. After this short digression I can continue my lecture. Yes, in these surroundings of oriental splendour the Emperor Justinian, the former Bulgarian peasant boy, rapacious and cruel, presided over life and death, war or peace. By his side sat the great Theodora, who interests me as much as Lucretia Borgia. She was called '*pia, augusta, doctissima et sanctissima*,' pious, august, the most learned and most saintly, the genius of a world empire, the graceful hussy of roadside inns. She was wickedness and cruelty incarnate, a match for Justinian, in whose reign 'four hundred million souls hath been put to the sword,' if we accept Prokop's figures. Even if we are sceptical toward Prokop we have to believe Gibbon, who says that under

ANATOLE FRANCE AND MME. BÖLÖNI

Justinian wholesale massacres had decimated what must have been known in those days as ' civilized ' mankind, and though we know what the purple of royalty has often covered, nevertheless, we are shocked by this statement. Let us now concentrate on the aisle of the church of San Vitale, its columns, the alabaster altar, the mosaics on the walls, the sparkling of the gold, which, I must say, does not inspire me to devotion. In the San Vitale I do not feel that I am in the temple of the humble Christ, who died on the cross. I look at the heathenish alabaster, the Moorish arches, and the Jewish railing of the altar and feel that lack of unity of purpose, awe-inspiring simplicity, which are the main attractions of some of our greatest churches in France. The Byzantinism of the San Vitale dulls our senses and lulls us to dream. It slows our mental activity. It is vague and uncertain. That is the contribution of the Orient to its character. That is what has made Byzantium the successor of Babylon and Nineveh, made it resemblant to the Egyptian and Hindoo civilizations."

I gave him a glass of mineral water from our thermos and he continued :

" Those mosaics, however, although fourteen hundred years old, are still modern, up to the moment. This may be, partly, due to the fact that they have been often renovated. They are always fresher whenever I see them. They possess some inherent qualities which make them look eternally young. The wall on the right side is Theodora's, while Justinian dominates the left. Please make a note," he asked me, " to look up in our hotel whether I remember all the titles of this bloodthirsty tyrant : Imperator, Cæsar, Flavius, Justinianus, Almanicus, Gothicus, Franciscus, Germanicus, Anticus, Alanicus, Vandalicus, Africanus, Pius, Felix, Inclytus, Victor ac Triumphator, Semper Augustus. The number of his titles should be as many as there are golden dots in the gloriole around his head.

" I find it amusing to see how obstinate that peasant looks under the weight of his crown. He is haughty and gloomy, shrewd and astute. His face is round, shaven and ruddy. He looks small and

strong on the mosaic and I think he was so in life. A brooch keeps together the wings of his purple on his broad shoulders. Holding aloft a vessel which he carries to the church, he treads in the midst of court dignitaries who look as determined and gloomy as he. One would think them capable of anything. They might have been bandits strutting in the garments of chevaliers. They all must have had their roles in their life, but on the picture they do nothing except keep their hands beneath their togas and tread on each other's feet.

" Theodora is just stepping forth from behind a heavy curtain. To the left and right are two charming ladies-in-waiting and two handsome courtiers. One of them, with a graceful gesture, lifts the curtain for the empress to pass. She is slender and her movements betray the dancer of the roadside inns. She, too, takes a vessel to the altar with the manner of one who knows that she is pretty. Her hands are small and so is her face under the glittering crown. One has the impression that she is setting her mouth tight to conceal her pains under the weight of her jewels. Her lips

betray cruelty and sensuousness. They remind me of the eyes of Cleopatra's mummy in the British Museum. They are magnetic and commanding. Their brilliancy is awe-inspiring, as if she were a bird of prey. Her hair is bluish black and the crown on her head is larger—is this symbolical ?—than Justinian's. Theodora, with the tight-set lips, that most cruel monster of all ages, had satisfied her lust for power with the blood of thousands of human beings."

XV
ON THE PINCIO OF ROME

XV

ON THE PINCIO OF ROME

WE leaned on the stone-laced railing of the Pincio, our glances lost in the distance. Below, the Eternal City issued forth a sound of continuous rumbling. Electric and motor cars, horse-drawn coaches and heavy trucks were rolling by and pedestrians were huddled in groups on the street corners. The shadows were growing, although above us the universe was all ablaze in the late afternoon golden and purple air, the reflection of the greenish haze of the near-by swamps. Towers, cupolas, arches and columns marked the spots where Saint Peter's, the Vatican, the Quirinal and the bridges of the Tiber stood, preparing to put on their dark shrouds for the night.

The lights of Rome, illuminating the shadow-hidden counters of its historical monuments, seemed to grow heavenward. They lit up past centuries, the heathen Rome of Nero, the era of early Christianity, the golden age of the Popes and

of the Renaissance, the battle of the ecclesiastic and secular rulers and the chaotic social and political struggles of to-day.

Anatole France said :

" I felt for a moment as if I had looked into the swirling waters of time, as if those white stones would have stolen the glow of the setting sun and with its aid would have disclosed to me the secrets they had seen once upon a time, the secrets of Rome's domination, its decline and fall. And through all this I am looking for beauty ; looking for beauty in man and nature. I am inclined to call beauty truth, because the former springs from the latter. But even if I were to admit that beauty and truth are not synonymous terms I should give preference to beauty because truth in her keeping is more glorious than truth pure and simple. I dare say that outside of beauty there is nothing real in the world. Lacking the appreciation of beauty we lack the knowledge of the truth of the past, of the present and of the future. It is beauty that teaches us to live. Renan thought so, too, when he exclaimed : ' Beauty is as good as virtue ! ' He was

IN THE FORUM ROMANUM IN FRONT OF TRAJAN'S COLUMN, ROME

misunderstood by those who find a Sadistic pleasure in shackling every natural impulse and noble thought. Art shows us that beauty is our greatest teacher, the refiner of morals, the inspirer of religion. What would we possess without artists and poets, without ancient Greece and Rome ? "

Once more his glance was lost in the misty reflection of the Eternal City. He was absorbed in the contemplation of the Roman sky, which was now blushing and then again growing pale, like the cheeks of a young girl. He was not with us in that moment. He gave his heart and his soul to the City of the Seven Hills. I divined what his thoughts were.

Chilling breezes made the laurels and myrtles shudder. The fragrance of jasmine and iris were wafted to us. From the Forum Romanum I heard the words of France's " Sur la Pierre Blanche " : " It was here that once the fate of the world was decided."

Suddenly the charm of the silence was broken. Automobiles and other vehicles drove past us and a large crowd filled the main street of the Pincio,

the favourite evening promenading place of the Romans. We were lost in loud speech, large gestures, shrieking laughter. Hundreds of women in bright dresses stepped on the stage.

"Let us go!" exclaimed France, frightened out of his reverie. "But before descending we will pay our traditional visit to Virgil and Horace."

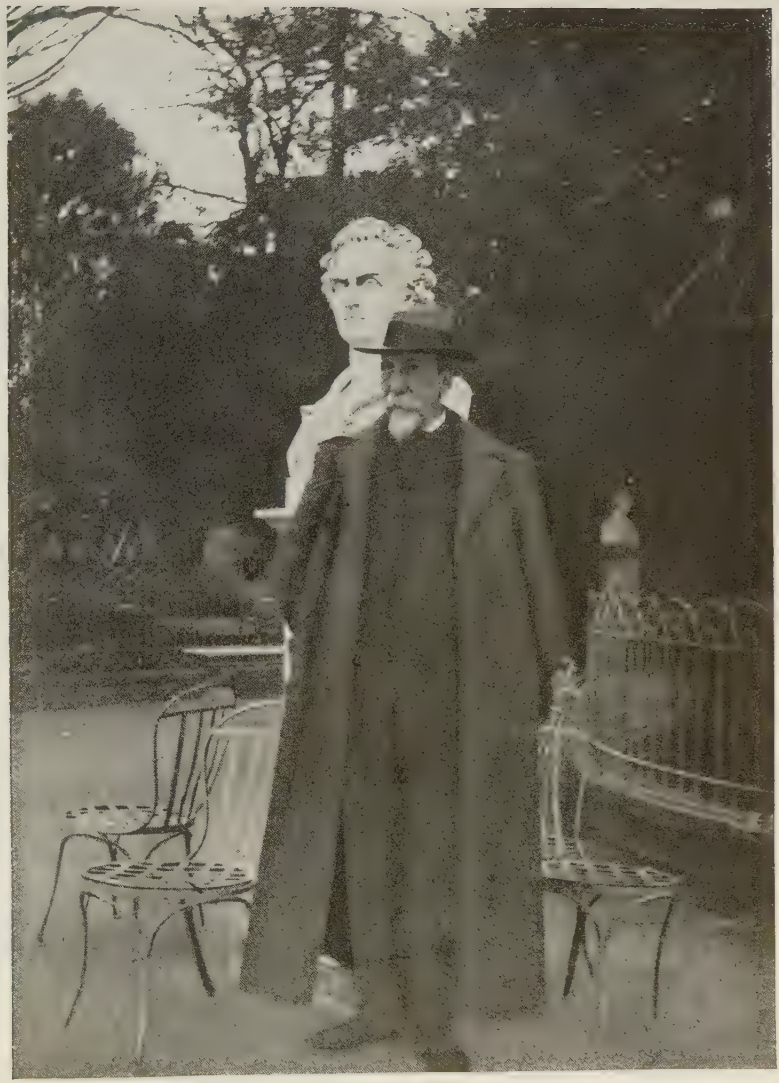
Near the two statues we sat down on a bank.

"This is a quiet and breezy place."

"Yes," he answered, "very few people come here. The public has not much use for Virgil and Horace nowadays."

We looked at the statues from all sides. The pale face and white hair of France matched perfectly the whiteness of the marble. The idea struck me that I was looking at the statues of three immortals. How would France look without beard and moustache, with long curly locks? He would be much like Horace.

"They are like most of the modern monuments exposed in public places," commented France, "just statues, stone without heart and soul. Yet they are interesting because they perpetuate the



BEFORE THE STATUE OF HORACE ON THE PINCIO, AT ROME

portraits of Horace and Virgil. Virgil is a typical Roman of the classical period. He is proud, a real patrician. Nevertheless, his eyes and mouth indicate great suffering. Horace is more like a Greek. His eyes remind me of Diderot, while his narrow lips, tight-set and malicious, bring Voltaire to mind. He looked at life with a sardonic smile, and he was one of those few who could ridicule himself adroitly."

France told me a story about the two poets.

" Horace once undertook a trip from Rome to the Adriatic coast with his friend Heliodor, the Greek orator. They progressed slowly on their mules. They had hired the tamest animals, but even so they proved to be only mediocre riders and their journey was interrupted several times. The first day they only went as far as Ariccia, the second day they reached the Forum Appii. On the Appian Way, where traffic was heavy, they made way for hurrying travellers. '*Minus est gravis Appia tardis.*' On their way they met Mæcenas and the Consul Cocius, who were going to Brindisi on an official errand. Mæcenas was delighted to meet

the poets and invited them to join him. Thus, he thought, the journey would be pleasanter and one of the scribes might even write a poem about the trip. Mæcenas had no objections to publicity. Neither was he mistaken in his supposition. Horace described this trip in his Fifth Satire—as witty and biting as ever. Will you remind me to read it to you at home ? Then Mæcenas took a shorter cut and Horace, with his companion, continued the journey by boat. It was a very long and frail craft, packed with passengers. The following morning, the two travellers mounted their mules again and continued their ride, tired from a sleepless night. Horace wrote a beautiful poem about that night's boating, vivid with the dark colours of gloom." With great gusto France went on :

" The fifth stop of the travellers was Anxur. It is a small town nestling at the foot of the granite cliffs of Valoska. He made it immortal with a single line, '*Impositum saxis late cadentibus Anxur.*' Here they met Mæcenas again, who had preceded them. From there they went to Formia, which is now a watering place, and there Virgil and

his two companions, Plotius and Varius, joined them. Horace and Virgil had many things in common. They had lofty aspirations and very often their sympathies and antipathies ran parallel. They spent their afternoons in meditation, while Mæcenas, an athlete, whiled away the time at ball games. Through Candium and Campania they left for Beneventum, where the innkeeper had prepared roasted thrushes for them and incidentally, almost set fire to his house. It was spring and the flesh of the thrush was tough and sinewy. They are good only in the autumn, when the birds have grown fat on olives and grapes. Horace, the gourmand, turned away in disgust."

"I feel as if you were speaking about an occurrence of the near past," I remarked.

"No matter what the age, there is no difference in whatever is universally human. History repeats itself, the same as fashions and customs. Real progress can be expected only from applied science. It will make man more human, although, at present, we are inclined to believe that it is degrading him. Let us go on with the narrative of the journey which

the statues of the two greatest poets of ancient Rome brought to my mind."

We started towards Rome, and France continued :

" As they approached the Apennines the road became steeper. At that time there was no highway through the mountains, so the Romans had to put up with much fatigue, in spite of their strong mules. They were very tired when they reached Pulli, where the Adriatic greeted them with its enchanting blue. They were greatly pleased when they beheld flowery dales dotted with lovely country houses. They camped for a night at a wayside inn at the base of the mountain where they burned branches of trees and the acrid smoke bit the eyes of Mæcenas and the two poets. Horace, who was more sensitive to smoke than the others, sought consolation in the company of a servant-maid of a near-by inn, which was so dirty that our poets preferred camping in the open. The maid promised to meet Horace after midnight but she did not come. This disappointment greatly disturbed the peace of mind and sleep of the poet.

"After such adventures they arrived at Bari, which Horace like to call '*piscosum*,' on account of its fisherfolk. Thence it was easy to travel to Brindisi, which at that time was the gateway to the Orient. Their last station was Gnatia, the name of which to-day is Torre d'Agnazzo. There the inhabitants, who had received them with great jubilation, tried to make them believe that in their temples the fire on the altar lighted itself through the faith of the believers. Horace and Virgil, however, cared very little for this miracle. 'You can tell this lie to others, not me!' exclaimed Horace, whose temper was quick. 'We are not Jews from Atella!' Renan, who did not like the Jews, liked this exclamation of the immortal."

From the Via del Tritone we turned to the Piazza Barberini and stopped before the fountain.

"This fountain," he said, "is in perfect harmony with the fall of the water gushing forth from its pipes. This is not the case with many other fountains, even if they are artistic otherwise."

On the Via Nazionale we walked slowly. The street, surging with humanity, was exceedingly

noisy. Children, with baskets in their hands, offered olives and lobster for sale. A boy was racing up and down the street, crying loudly :

" Signori, don't forget about the flowers ! "

France bought the whole basket, put one flower in his buttonhole and gave the others to the boy, who, overjoyed, ran away with his gift.

The smell of meat was wafted to us from the taverns. As the doors of some of them opened we noticed simple people sitting around the tables, punctuating their conversation with broad gestures. They poured the red Chianti into their glasses and laughed loudly. Some of them ate macaroni or spaghetti, carefully winding it on the prongs of their forks. Their good appetite was too great a temptation for us.

" Perhaps we had better not go to our hotel for dinner," suggested France. " We might just as well go to one of these places."

He said this in front of a restaurant from which came the sound of song and music and the smell of roasted onions. We looked at each other encouragingly and entered.

We took seats at a corner table, from where we could overlook the whole room. Around the tables, covered with white and red cloths, sat people of all ranks and occupations. Our right-hand neighbour was a country priest, fat and comfortable. By his side sat a lady in black, a bit withered, yet quite comely, in spite of her red hands. The third person at the table was a Madonna-like young girl who resembled both the lady and the priest. An awkward theologian, young himself, was the neighbour of the charming girl. He was constantly rubbing his long nose with his large coloured handkerchief, evidently because he did not know what else to do with his hands. At the table to our left were two officers, a civilian and three well-dressed, fairly young ladies. Their speech and gestures betrayed that they were actresses. In front of us there was a family—a man, a woman and two adolescent boys. The head of the family looked like a petty clerk. Further down we saw a couple of young men whom we took for college boys. Opposite them sat a few actors who were making fun of each other's mistakes. The majority of the guests

were artisans and store clerks. There were a few foreigners, mostly English and German, who had come there to see "real Roman life." We overheard a German saying that the place had a reputation as having the best kitchen in that section.

"Now that I know that the kitchen is good," said France with a slight sneer, "I feel that my appetite is less good. Only my eyes are hungry."

The door opened and new guests arrived—two tall Germans who, judging from their accent, must have come from Hamburg. Scarcely had they sat down when a gypsy girl jumped into the centre of the room, and began to dance and sing. An old gypsy, playing on the mandolin, watched her intently. Waiters came with steaming dishes and the owner went from table to table, asking if his guests were comfortable. It was warm, the air stuffy. A waiter placed spaghetti and a bottle of Noccerai on our table. France took only a bite. From beneath his lowered eyelids he was observing the table of the country priest.

"How that lady friend of the priest is used up physically and spiritually," said France in whis-

pered tone. " How sad and timid is the offspring of their illicit love. I can foresee the fate of that young girl. She will be the housekeeper of that awkward young theologian, who will get as fat and lazy as the priest is. The worst that can befall him is that one day, when gossip has become too annoying, he will have to send her away. He will take a younger housekeeper, who will be just as obedient as the other. Why did her mother become the housekeeper of the priest ? She has to suffer now for her sin. She is aware of her fate. That is why she tries to look so insignificant. Both she and her daughter are humble and timid, oppressed by the consciousness of an ever-impending danger. That poor young girl is more alone in the world than if she were an orphan. She never can be a gay and happy girl. She feels the leaden weight of the original sin and that she lives in the Valley of Sorrows. Her fate will be even more tragic when the conflict between her natural inclinations and the commandments of religion becomes more intense."

How peculiar, I thought, that such things should occur to the Master here in Rome.

A glass was broken. Loud laughter ensued and the spurs of the officers clattered on the floor. Everybody looked in their direction. There was a bottle of Asti on the floor, its red contents foaming.

" That is how I'll drop you," cried one of the actresses. A young officer threatened her jokingly with a finger. " Yes, sir, I'll drop you if you cheat me with that woman."

The restaurant was rocking with laughter. The young theologian did not dare to laugh. He was smiling. The two women at the priest's table kept silent and looked at each other, bewildered.

Nothing happened. The waiter brought another bottle of wine and the actress and the officer looked at each other more fondly than ever before.

We overheard the priest talking at the table to our right :

" Such women are obsessed by Satan. It is a pity to waste the good wine. That young officer does not know how to tame her and allows her to boss him. He should break her—chastise her, so that she may reform and like Magdalene bow her sinful head in the dust at the feet of the Saviour."

"We know," said France, "that every religion is intolerant and cruel. Nevertheless, I am shocked when I hear such a frank revelation of human savagery disguised as religion. This man would kill his fellow man's soul and crucify his body out of misapplied religious fanaticism. And the others, who are posssessed of real faith, have to suffer the pains of the Inferno. We must not use our free will because these fanatical gentlemen think it leads us into damnation. Those of us who insist on using our free will will have to pay the penalty. Why don't people with faith and will learn from the lessons of the past? Why do they insist on dying for a cause which benefits only those who are stoning them to death?"

While France was speaking the gypsy girl had taken a place at the table with the Germans, lit a cigarette and evidently uninvited, drank the red wine. The two women at the priest's table had become livelier. At the tables covered with red cloth the artisans drank Chianti and smoked acrid tobacco. Two of them were particularly loud and tried to convert their neighbours to Socialism.

However, their companions did not feel dissatisfied with the existing social conditions and were smiling benignantly, leaving the Socialists uncontradicted.

The door opened and an elegantly clad canon entered. The other priest waved greeting with his hand. After they had kissed each other the canon ordered champagne.

" I know this type of clergyman from my Italian journeys," said France. " Their French colleagues are exactly like them. La Fontaine describes them in one of his tales as the incarnations of Good and Evil. There are, of course, many ascetics among them who torture their bodies and souls, in expectation of greater bliss in after-life. For such priests earthly existence is of little value and, judging the world by themselves, they enjoy torture and pains and are merciless and intolerant to others. There are sham ascetics, too, who want to have bliss in this life, not only in the Elysian fields. These are the hypocrites, who are good only to themselves but cruel and inconsiderate to others. I have come across many epicurean priests who have become fat on macaroni. I have met others who are neither good

nor bad, occasionally harmful on account of their ignorance, hard-hearted and obstinate, yet, sentimental when their interest is at stake. They like to quote: 'Happy are the ignorant because theirs is the knowledge.' But we must not generalize. We find practically the same types in every walk of life. The sins which caused the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah are still virulent and would justify the destruction of many villages—many cities."

"*Allons enfants . . .*" we heard some one singing.

When we looked in the direction from whence the sound came we saw that the two Germans had chased the gyspy girl away. She stood for a moment in the centre of the room, her mouth open with amazement, then threw back her head and continued to sing the Marseillaise, proud and provocative:

"*. . . Le jour de gloire est arrive . . .*"

The Germans shouted at her to get out, while three Italians hurried to protect her. The old gypsy, too, limped to her side. In the din which

followed one heard only "*Tedeschi, tedeschi*" Germans, Germans! The *padrone* finally succeeded in re-establishing order. The Germans paid their bill and left. The gypsy girl, the heroine of the night, now sang the Marseillaise by request and after finishing the French anthem, took up a collection. The actresses and officers were particularly generous. Even the artisans gave her silver coins and the canon slipped a piece of gold on her plate. The other priest, however, gave nothing. Instead he rebuked the young theologian, who wanted to give her some money.

"You can give your money for a much better cause. These gypsy folks do not deserve it."

"I did not know you were so slow to grasp things," said the canon. "This is no question of 'gypsy folk.' What we want to demonstrate is our solidarity with the French, our Latin brethren."

"But the Marseillaise is a revolutionary song."

"What is the use of arguing with you? It is too late, anyhow. Let us go!"

"I share his opinion," said France. "Out of sympathy with him we might go, too."

We walked home very slowly in the mild spring night. The moon was bathing in the Yellow Tiber, as Horace liked to call the river. On such nights it is a custom with the Romans to say that even the fish are going mad with love.

" How invigorating to see the town without the tourist and native crowd," said France, " and to imagine ourselves wandering in ancient Rome. I like to look at Rome as if it were a picture. Sometimes it looks to me so unreal, so pathetically forlorn in the shadow of the past. '*Odi profanum vulgus*,' said our favourite poet, and, I think, I am of his opinion."

XVI
THINGS THAT ANATOLE FRANCE LIKED

XVI

THINGS THAT ANATOLE FRANCE LIKED

ROME

FOR weeks we had spent the greater part of the day in the Museo delle Terme. This museum was one of France's favourites. We arrived before it was open and left when everybody had gone. The guards knew us and called our attention to the closing hour when they could not stay any longer. On such occasions France was always much surprised. "Time flies fast among the things of the past," he complained.

It was difficult for him to get away from his favourite pictures and statues. He would turn back several times, caressing them with his eyes, as if he were saying, "I will return." His attitude toward masterpieces was that of absolute devotion. In a museum he liked to be either alone or with people who were as devoted to art as he. A loud voice made him shudder. We usually waited until there

were only a few spectators in the room we wished to visit. Frivolous remarks of people who could not appreciate beauty made him suffer.

His pleasure in a museum was greatly lessened when seeing mediocre " objects " beside real masterpieces. If he could not avoid looking at the objectionable pieces, he preferred to leave alone the whole collection, though it contained things he would have liked to see. Collections in the Vatican Museum often jarred on his æsthetic sense. It was too crowded and one could not get rid of the thought that it was arranged without sufficient care.

France was the most unselfish lover of beauty. His vision was not obscured by prejudices, though he was enthusiastic in his predilections. He could control himself marvellously, notwithstanding the fact that his temper was quick. With him, enthusiasm had the character of an intense warm light and not of the explosiveness of fireworks. Since he knew how to use it economically, it enhanced the intensity of his vision. He was seldom partial and if, in spite of his self-control, his sympathy swayed him in one direction he was quick to acknowledge this fact.

There was a Greek head in the Museo delle Terme which, although it was not a classical piece, France like to look at. It reminded him of a fading flower.

We approached the " Throne of Venus " with the spirit of repentance of one who had been unfaithful to his love. We had not seen it for so long ! That beautiful marble dates back to the golden age of archaic art. It is, according to art critics, the chair of a statue of Venus which disappeared, no one knows when. Two of its exterior sides are ornamented with bas-reliefs. On the right side there is a young girl with a flute and on the left a veiled matron offering her sacrifice to the goddess. The back of the chair represents the birth of Venus, as she emerged from the foaming waves.

" There is rhythm and music in the curves of that youthful body," remarked France, leaning over the bas-relief. " Which of our contemporary artists could draw it better ? This archaic artist must have been a great anatomist. I cannot repeat often enough that every art requires great knowledge. Lack of knowledge makes us trivial, some-

times even vicious. The kindness of a man with a narrow horizon has no value. Goodness without intelligence is ineffectual. Lack of knowledge would have made the artist the slave of chance. He does not need to find himself first by floundering around before he can rise to the heights of his genius."

He found the "Five Dancers of Cambodia" particularly charming because Mme. de Caillavet had liked them.

When we reached the "Satyr Pouring Wine," he could not repress a smile. The satyr's face was distorted with eroticism and intoxication. He held a wine pitcher in the one hand and a goblet in the other.

"No doubt," he said in front of a statue called "Orestes and Elektra," "that this was a tomb. Its carvings express great sadness. The features of Agamemnon's children almost vibrate under the hard blows of the Fates. They would stand in this pose only before a tomb. It would be interesting to know whose tomb it was. I like to believe that the artist was a pupil of Praxiteles. However different

FRANCE LOOKING AT THE WHITE STONES OF ROME FROM THE PINCIO

the conception of the satyr may be from that of this monument, there is something fundamentally akin in both of them. They bring to my mind Racine's poems."

For a long time we stood in front of the greatest masterpiece of the Museo delle Terme, "Orpheus Playing a Harp."

" This was a funeral monument too," explained France, and went into the description of every detail. I could not help thinking that if posterity could not mark France's grave with a monument like this, it should be marked with a tree, its crown spreading to heaven. He very much despised standardized funeral monuments.

* * * * *

When the night descended on the white stones of Rome France used to tell us stories. When he told us his stories, new life sprang from the old stones of the Eternal City.

One night he told us how Rome looked in the time of Emperor Honorius, when she was menaced by the Barbarians.

" Legends are sometimes stronger than

weapons," he said. " It was a legend that, in the belief of the ancient Romans, protected their city from the Barbarians. I made a note of this legend, as narrated by Olympiodorus. Here it is :

" There was a monument near Messina, between the straits and the promontory of Etna. In the time of Alaric and Stilicho the inhabitants of Sicily dedicated the monument to the deities of the Sea and Fire. One leg of the monument rested in a pot in which fire was burning, eternal fire being the symbol of Nature's soul. The other leg was immersed in a basin of water, which signified the eternity of the Sea, the father of the universe. The monument was vested with the magic power of stopping the flow of lava from Mount Etna and preventing the landing of the Barbarians. It was this monument which caused the tempest in which Alaric's fleet was destroyed. A few years after this miracle a Christian was appointed governor of Sicily and he had the monument of the heathens pulled down. From that time the lava and the Barbarians had no obstacles in their way.

" Seven years after the protective power of the

legend had been broken, the Visigoths invaded Rome. By that time the Eternal City had changed considerably. The temples of the heathens had been destroyed and consecrated to the cult of the Christians, and on the seven hills of Rome seven churches attracted the pilgrims."

PERUGIA

" Perugia, Assisi," said France as we were going to visit those two places, " they are my favourites among the Italian towns. Yet, we shall not stay long within their gates. We shall just taste the pleasure of rambling through their queer streets so that we may yearn for them later."

Perugia received France with greater pomp than any oriental potentate could devise: it received him with a marvellous afternoon, the sun setting behind the hills.

When we reached the railway station in the cradle-like valley of Perugia, the town stood in front of us, garbed in the flame of what at first sight seemed to us huge bonfires. The silver-coloured olive trees and the spears of the cypress trees were

all aglow behind the towers of the gates. Just above the dark shadow of the valley a flaming river was flowing. Far above, near the sky, a grey mass of old stones looked like woolly smoke. On the sky, radiant with the colours of the Umbrian school, violet clouds were floating toward the hills around Lago Trasimeno and ancient Spoleto. The plateau, enshrouded in fairy colours, showed its beauties through the descending mist.

Riding in a coach towards the city, the face of France was radiant.

"The old stones," he remarked, "give forth their fire accumulated throughout the centuries. In every corner we find mementoes dating far back into Etruscan times."

Walking among Etruscan walls the following morning I felt as if I were in the seventh heaven. We came across heathenish beauty—solid, amazing, grandiose. Old temples and graves dazzled our eyes with new revelations. I could not tell, so entranced was I, whether I was visiting the landmarks of Etruscan culture or whether the buildings and monuments came in solemn procession to

FRANCE AND MME. BÖLÖNI ON THE STEPS OF THE CHURCH OF SAN ERCOLANO, PERUGIA

show me their beauty. I was in the city where Saint Francis performed his miracles and where the Renaissance reached its maturity. I saw all the glories of Perugia and besides, I saw the gaudy tents of the hucksters, a very bad statue of Garibaldi, a legion of naughty children, and gesticulating promenaders.

From the noise of the market place we took refuge near a Pinturicchio picture, representing an angel with a lily. We admired a fresco of the " Prophets and Sibyls " by Arnolfo di Cambio and paintings of our beloved Perugino.

So many things reminded us of Saint Francis of Assisi that we fell to talking about him. France quoted Renan :

" ' The dirty beggar of Assisi was the founder of Italian art.' I, too," commented France, "attribute the development of Italian art to Saint Francis, the ' dirty beggar,' and not to Saint Dominic, as many people think. No doubt, even without Saint Francis, Italian art would have gravitated towards the reproduction of real life, thus emancipating itself from Byzantian art. The poet-monk

of Assisi merely speeded up the process. He had the faculty of moving huge human masses and of dominating them with love and simplicity. It was he who conceived the *pieta* in Italian painting. The old gods were merciless and punished us in the seventh generation. Jesus, the Son of Man, brought us love and mercy. He came to save humanity through His sufferings. Saint Francis was his disciple, a reincarnation of the Master. We seldom come across the picture of Saint Dominic, but we often see the sad face of the monk of Assisi. There are thousands of such paintings scattered all over Italy. We saw him on the mosaics of San Giovanni di Laterano, in the temple of Santa Maria Maggiore, in old frescoes and statues. He is the most popular Italian saint.

" Do you remember," France asked me, " the ' Vision of Ezekiel ' on the cupola of the Baptistery in Parma ? The Saint plays a very prominent part there. In the Institut des Beaux Arts of Sienna I counted over forty pictures of Saint Francis.

" I must confess that the legends connected with his name made me love Saint Francis. I like

to hear that he spoke to flowers, fish, birds and even ferocious animals and they understood him. Nay, he could converse with the stones and the dust. Can anything be more poetical than that? He visited the shepherds and helped the labourers in the fields. Saint Francis of Assisi was as perfect as if he had never lived—as if he himself were a beautiful legend. Yet, we do know that he lived. I find him very human in that he, unintentionally, aroused such a great passion in Clare Scifi, who later became Santa Chiara, or, as we know her, Saint Clare. To this pure affection, I have been told, he owes, to a large extent, his canonization. On the whole, I am inclined to believe that Renan was not altogether right in calling him 'dirty.' He had a pure soul. I am afraid that we may discover many other mistakes of our good friend Renan.

"There is, however, one thing in reference to the Saint which I cannot understand. How could this timid monk be a soldier? It is true that Perugia's past was more troubled than that of any Italian city, not excepting Florence. For many centuries the inhabitants of the town lived the life of soldiers.

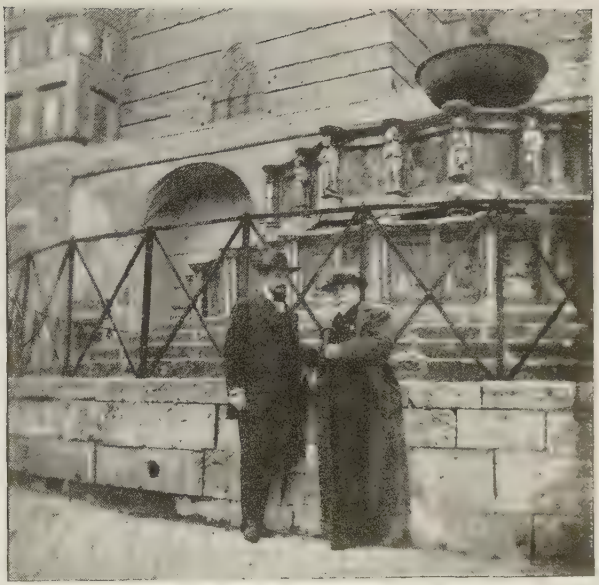
They were fighting the Etruscans, Hannibal, the popes, the tyrants, and the feudal lords. These stones have witnessed many a bloody event of history. They look glum—almost horrifying.

" Yet, I love Perugia for the same reason which makes me love Saint Francis. In spite of its bloody history it has remained human and artistic. Its beauty is not based on dogmas. This town lives, loves, and suffers. The spirit of Saint Francis of Assisi is still haunting Perugia."

ASSISI

Our coach was slowly moving over the cypress and oak-bedecked mountainside. As the valley broadened out we noticed the gleaming Tiber. The water reflected the round arches of San Giovanni's Roman bridge. Fairy villages and towns, partly hidden by the green foliage of oak, enthralled the eye. In front of us there was a yellow sea of fields, dotted with the bright red and blue of peasants and girls. France was visibly delighted with so much beauty.

' Our friend, President de Brosses," he



FRANCE AND DR. COUCHOUD IN FRONT OF THE MAGGIORE FOUNTAIN, PERUGIA

IN THE OLD CONVENT OF SAN MARTINO

remarked, " whose book has guided us so far, does not take us to Assisi. We shall, therefore, emancipate ourselves and pay a visit, without our guide, to this gem of Italy. I am afraid the president missed a great deal when he neglected to look at the Roman bridge which so playfully teases the Tiber. It evidently did not occur to him that the river might be quite different in the valleys of Umbria, haunted by mirages, from the Tiber which is squeezed in between the grand-seigneurial palazzos of Rome. He must have forgotten that Saint Francis often crossed the bridge coming from Perugia to Assisi. We know from old annals that on a night of ' vibrating stars,' when he was led as a prisoner of the Perugians, he trod those paths forlorn of men, but looked after by his Master. He must have thought in that hour of need of poor rich Clare Scifi, who was worrying more about his fate than he himself."

" Was the Saint aware of the affections of Saint Clare ? " I asked.

" Although she was a virgin, Clare was woman enough to let him know about her sentiments.

It was at that time that she made the vow of poverty and lived in the convent of which Saint Francis was the founder. The monk and the nun must have seen each other quite frequently although they lived far apart. He lived on the peak of the mountain and she in the dale. The nun knew well what his favourite haunts were and often she came to meet him. They would continue to walk together along the Topino and in the forest. They were innocent and happy. However, malicious people began to wag their tongues and one day, when they had returned from their walk, Francis of Assisi surprised her with these words :

" ' We shall not be able to see each other for a long time.'

" She, the pure loving creature, was pained. Francis told her that they could not meet until red roses bloomed where the snow was then lying. Clare shuddered at the thought of so long a separation. Hardly had she taken a few steps homeward when she stopped. Francis turned around and, as he was a believer in miracles, saw red roses blooming in the snow. He hurried back to Clare and

when quite near, he noticed that what he had taken for red roses was blood."

Our coach reached a curve. In front of us we saw Assisi, a small fortified town, a part of which climbed the slopes of the mountain and another part kept company with the Tiber. Among the towers and cupolas, the Cathedral of San Rufino occupied a dominating position. Past centuries kept watch over the town whose stones shimmered in the colours of the rainbow.

We were sorry when, after having lost this magnificent view, we found ourselves meandering through the tortuous streets. We walked through the long corridor of the monastery, named after Saint Francis, and found only a few monks in the building, who spent their days in prayer. On the square which looked down on the town we were charmed by the church in which Saint Clare was buried. However, we were somewhat disappointed to see her, whom we had always fancied as a beautiful woman, lying in her coffin, a shrunken mummy, with an artificial nose and her cheeks rouged. In life she was simple and a lover of poverty. Her

coffin was sorrounded with waxen images and gaudy decorations.

On another square we discovered a pagan temple ; the vestibule of a Minerva shrine from the time of Augustus. Its Corinthian columns and noble frontispiece have remained intact notwithstanding the wars.

France studied the shrine with great interest. He looked at it as one looks at a miniature, analysing even the smallest details. He was teaching me, at the same time, in his usual unrestrained and jovial manner. He never was pedantic or condescending, not being afflicted with what we call to-day a " superiority complex." He gave from the treasures of his vast knowledge in a way which was never offending. Teaching came so naturally from his mouth that one gained knowledge unaware that it was through someone else that one added to their stock of information. The Master taught me how to read the old stones of ancient Rome. He taught me to enjoy the beauties of the different styles in architecture ; he taught me to understand the secrets of the entablature. He told me what

were the favourite decorations of old architecture, what were the triglyph, the gouttelette and the style of the column heads. What I had learned during the day I repeated with great devotion by night, so that I might not forget his words.

" The artist made these leaf decorations on the column," he said, " just as he had seen them on the meadows. He preserved both the graceful lines and the simplicity of conception. The mystery of architectural creation is to look for truth. It is so difficult to find. Yet, talent and inspiration sometimes make us stumble on it. Once Minerva came to earth to study the plants and beasts of the world. She had hardly taken a few steps when she noticed a beautiful young man leaning against a column. In the grass alongside the road a donkey was grazing complacently. The puzzled features of the youth aroused Minerva's sympathy. She spoke to him in her melodious voice. At that moment the naughty god Amor shot an arrow through the heart of the youth. Such shots, as we know from the legend, are mortal only in that they make us fall in love. Minerva talked

to the man for a very long time and he, being in love with her, did not notice how fast time was flying. At the end of an Olympian second—because the time of the immortals is different from ours—the goddess noticed, much to her fright, that the youth had become an old man. She had to leave the earth and was much distressed at the thought that the poor mortal had become so old. To compensate him for his loss she wanted to make him immortal. But how to do it? She was the goddess of Knowledge and she knew that only artists were immortal. Suddenly she had an inspiration; art must have a new branch in which knowledge should be supreme.

" ' You will be an architect,' she told him with a kiss.

" From that moment the man was young again, an artist—an architect, an immortal. He jumped to his feet and noticing that his donkey, which had died long ago, had a leaf in his mouth which, in that moment of great elation, he found extremely beautiful, he pulled it out of the animal's mouth and promised the goddess to make it a part

of art. He kept his promise, the proof of which we have in front of us."

In the two churches of Saint Francis we looked at the frescoes of Giotto and Cimabue. Neither of us knew how far they represented fiction and how far they showed real life. The artists themselves must have been at a loss to find the border line between imagination and reality. It was Giotto who had dreamed and created the legendary life of Saint Francis of Assisi.

"Whenever I see a Giotto picture," said France, "I like him even more although he is a primitive. Many people reproach me for my dislike of the primitive and my preferences for the artists of the Renaissance. My critics are right to a certain extent. I do not like the majority of the primitives because they are naïve and ignorant nor do I like the naïveté of the adults. It is either conscious, that is to say, artificial and lying, or it shows a lack of comprehension and knowledge. But I do like the primitives who have real talent as Giotto and Ghirlandaio."

We went from one picture to another. France

pointed out a tiny church in the corner of one of the pictures.

"How original and exhilarating! There is some architecture on each Giotto picture. On this canvas he had only that speck in the corner and he put his architecture there. I had been looking for it."

When we left the town of Saint Francis, France reverted to his comment on Renan.

"I am afraid," he said, "that I gave the impression that Renan did not like the 'dirty beggar.' I do not want to be unjust and, therefore, I quote him again, so that he may speak for himself. *Voici:* 'Like the Saint of Assisi, I have traversed the world. Both of us, although we had nothing, found that we were rich. God hath given us the usufruct of the universe and we have been satisfied with it.'"

THE CATHEDRAL OF RHEIMS

Through the Simplon Tunnel we were going towards Paris. Our train was passing by the green valleys of the Champagne, flowery meadows,

century-old trees, villages with slender towers shooting up towards the heavens.

We talked about Italy and the antique art, but France's interest was no longer in the South. A magic force drew him to the place where he felt most at home : Paris.

" Look, a living Poussin picture ! " France exclaimed. We leaned out of the window to see a Champagne peasant woman, clad in Prussian blue, working in the field, behind the golden-coloured morning haze. She was tall and her legs were a gleaming light against the vivid green of the grass. There was a meandering brook in front of her and the charming curves of the Champagne hills closed in on the horizon. Even the clouds resembled those which Poussin liked to paint on his mythological pictures.

" How classical the forms, how graceful the movements ! " said France. " The trees and the landscape are like old etchings. That peasant woman might have been a Diana or Ceres in one of Poussin's pictures. All his paintings are typical French pictures of French landscapes, as seen by a

Frenchman. The real artist always remains faithful to his nationality in his art, even if in his political conviction he is an internationalist. Foreign influences may broaden his horizon, but, because he is more impressionable than the average man, the influences of his childhood and youth, the reactions of his native soul, make a deeper mark on him than they would do on a non-artist. Even in France Heine remained a German Jew and in the court of the Prussian king Voltaire was a Frenchman."

In that moment France's face was like that of a tired child hurrying to his mother. There was no sceptical or ironical gleam in his eyes now. Sometimes he would look out the window and sometimes he would close his eyes. One who did not know him would think that he was asleep. I knew that closing his eyes meant that he was intensely concentrating on some subject. In the corner of his mouth an indefinable smile lingered. It was bitter and sad, timid and benevolent.

We arrived at Chalon and took a walk on the platform. It was warm and the sky was beautiful. France was suddenly seized by the desire to go to

THE THEATRE SQUARE IN PADUA

FRANCE WITH DR. COUCHOUD, HIS PHYSICIAN

Rheims and look at the Cathedral. We would listen to the chatter of the Vesle and delight in the gobelin picture of the Virgin of Orleans.

"Rheims is our pride," he said, "our Parthenon. I have an irrepressible urge to go there. Perhaps something is going to happen to the Cathedral. An earthquake or a furious tempest may damage it. Or I may go blind or may die."

I saw by the railway guide that we could stay in Rheims three and a half hours and then catch a good express train to Paris which would arrive in the capital late in the afternoon.

France looked much livelier when he got out of the automobile at the Cathedral of Rheims. He walked so hurriedly that I could hardly keep step with him. When he stopped he leaned against the trunk of an old, old tree, which had been partly destroyed by a thunderbolt. The Cathedral stood before us, showing three-fourths of its profile. We found, as was the case with several very old buildings, that the grey stones were shimmering in the colours of the rainbow. The moss made them appear greenish and the rain, to look yellowish red.

The sun, which had warmed the stones for many centuries, imparted to them a peculiar bluish undertone. The shadows added to these colours a black which reminded one of the twilight sky covered with clouds. The Cathedral itself might have been a gigantic cloud come to earth. Its shape changed according to the point of observation of the spectator. First I had thought it was rising heavenward like the flame of a torch, then I had the impression it was a giant woman on her knees and the two towers were her hands outstretched in pious supplication.

From the huge mass of stone the details slowly evolved, the consoles, the columns, the arches and the windows. It was only gradually that one could realize its magnificence. It was the same as when one sees a rose. First, one notices its colour, then its shape and finally its petals and the many little things which give it charm.

The glossy leaves of the old trees leaned on the countless arches of the Cathedral with affectionate love. The harmony of the whole was further enhanced by the amorous embrace of the delicate

lines of the arches and the trees. They had grown accustomed to living together. For how many centuries had the Cathedral been holding in embrace the age-old trees? This was an inspiring union of Nature with Art.

France placed his hand on my shoulder. I looked up to him. I had never before seen his face so pale, nor his eyes so dark and feverishly brilliant. The Cathedral was in his eyes, the awe of the masterly creation in his thoughts. Before monumental buildings, if they were artistic, he always felt uneasy, his heart madly palpitating. He was afraid to look at so much beauty.

We went to the main entrance of the Cathedral. The foaming Vesle roared into the silence of the living old stones. There was a rumbling, rolling noise, as when far-off cliffs re-echo a thunderstorm. They were the mysterious sounds of Eternity!

"Only the Cathedral of Rheims has this echo," said France. "On its walls the past and present meet. I know now that the fate of our national Parthenon is the destiny of mankind."

He pointed to the city in front of us.

" How the city reposes in the languid noon hour ! Her walls are standing guard at the resting place of many centuries. How rhythmical and slow is the life of the streets. How tiny are the houses of dear old Rheims in the shadow of its majestic Cathedral."

On the streets, running starlike from several squares, we saw occasionally a yellow or red bus, trudging heavily. We seldom saw an electric car.

The breeze carried away the sound of the noon bell, which was lost in the distance amid the murmur of the every-day life of the streets.

Standing before the main entrance, I was struck by its beauty more than ever before. Its powerful lines seemed to lift the whole building. I really believed that the saints whose statues enlivened the gate portal could work miracles. I found Power, the main figure in the centre, particularly impressive. I was full of admiration for the artist who imparted grace to the heavy stones by intertwining the wreaths of a host of angels floating in the air with the hard rocks massed together with infinite pain.

" Its lines are striving toward eternity, like human thought," remarked France. " Although this Cathedral belongs to the whole world, yet, it is rooted in the French soil. Gothic architecture is French in its origin. Gothic art was Gallic art. In the Middle Ages scholars called this style '*Opus Francigenum,*' the French system. As to the apostles, saints and martyrs, whose statues ornament the walls of the Cathedral, they are typical Frenchmen."

Thus conversing, we slowly walked over to the northern gate.

" This gate," remarked France, " is a fine example of what I call ' majestic simplicity.' Simplicity is not the discovery of the modern age. The dominating figure on this side is God, who sits in judgment over the dead. The outlines of the other figures are merely indicated. The artist, who had a perfect mastery of his material, could afford simplicity. And how human these figures are ! They could be our contemporaries, although they have been carved into stone for seven hundred years. They awaken to life as if they had been merely

asleep. Expectation and reconciliation to life are clearly written on their features. Their movements are rhythmical like music. This rhythm brings harmony into the whole episode.

"Saint Denis, our French martyr, carries his head in his hand. The two angels who cover his bleeding neck with a flaming crown are symbolical. They help to express the tragedy of unrealized aspirations and the bliss that, one day, they will become a reality. It is, from the artistic point of view, simplicity glorified in faultless achievement. The mantle of the saint is the perfection of the art of drapery carving. Though I like the nude human form in sculpture I have to admit that the carving of drapery ranks very high in art."

In our rambles around the Cathedral France would often make deprecatory remarks about unsuccessful attempts at the restoration of some parts.

"Almost every attempt at restoration is doomed in advance. It is only Nature that one may and should copy. The copying of artistic creations is a sacrilege. Restoration is mostly loose imitation, from which the cohesive power of real art is

missing. Knowledge is not sufficient in art. I do not mean to say that knowledge is unnecessary. I have always given precedence to knowledge over ignorance," he added with a sardonic smile.

On the left side of the Cathedral he pointed out the consoles connecting the columns.

" It is, perhaps, the form of the consoles which gives the impression that the Cathedral has the shape of a kneeling woman. In order to understand the significance of all its forms one has to look at a building from all sides. This is the case, most particularly, with Gothic art. Its forms are most varied and it is highly individualistic. An architect who is merely talented and industrious could not undertake the building of a Gothic church. Those who have built such magnificent Cathedrals had to be geniuses, architect poets. In its infancy Gothic art was received with great hostility and even many centuries afterwards it had to suffer from misunderstanding and malice. Which proves that it was born of genius.

" It was the French who imported Gothic art to England. It was, however, most popular in

Germany. The Germans took a liking to the new art and by christening it ' Gothic ' indicated that they would like to adopt it as their own. It must be said to the credit of the Germans that in their country Gothic art has not degenerated or become the servant of whimsical expressionism."

We enjoyed entering the dimly lit Cathedral from the sun-bathed square. The face of the Virgin Mary looked at us from one of the window panes.

" She is a typical French woman," said France, smiling. " She has the oval face of the girls of Normandy. These windows are as brilliant as those of the Notre Dame that were not destroyed by profane hands during the Revolution. Those that have been restored lack beauty and do not fit in with their surroundings."

We sat on a bench facing the altar of the Virgin of Orleans. In front of us we saw the gobelin of the Pucelle. France wiped his glasses and with twinkling eyes looked at her very long.

" How slender her waist is in the armour," he said. " Her hands and feet are as narrow as those of the Indian idols. She does, in fact, remind me of

Lakmé. The cult of woman and her artistic idealization shows many similarities in every age and in every land. The sacred women of the pagans, of Christianity and of other religions were mostly virgins. It was not without male selfishness that man had made the virgin maid his ideal. She is—and must be—virgin for everyone except himself. Our Joan of Arc took this selfishness for granted so that the people might think she was the chosen one. There are people who think — unjustly, I may add—that I do not like Joan of Arc because in one of my books I described her such as she was and not such as superstitious folk think she ought to have been. The real Joan of Arc is more deserving of our sympathy than that of the current fiction."

The wall of the nave of the Cathedral was covered with another gobelin, which represented the legend of the Virgin. All over the gobelin inset flowers were strewn with no other purpose than to delight the eye.

When we were out again we cast a parting glance at the towers of the Cathedral. Now it

seemed that its grey stones were resting, in defiance of the laws of gravitation, on the solid blue of the noonday sky. If at some time a catastrophe or age itself should destroy the Cathedral of Rheims, its reflection, we could not help thinking, would remain on the face of the infinite and in the memory of what is eternal in man.

Sitting on the square, France buried his head in his hands. He said no more about the Cathedral. He was too much moved by the sight and felt something akin to fear in the shadow of the powerful arches.

"What would happen," I wondered, "if the organ began to play, all the wax candles were lit and in purple and velvet, gold-and-gem-bedecked, the French kings who have been crowned here would enter through the gate, and the priest at the altar would intone the prayer:

"*Sursum corda!*"

XVII
TWO OLD FRIENDS MEET

XVII

TWO OLD FRIENDS MEET

ANATOLE FRANCE had selected the best dishes for the luncheon in honour of Rodin. Previous to this luncheon they had not met for thirty years. It was not an easy matter to bring about this meeting. I succeeded, however, by playing upon the weakness of both Titans for antique objects of art. I had often spoken to France about Rodin's collection of statues at Meudon and *vice versa,* called Rodin's attention to the treasures in the Villa Saïd. I had gradually awakened their interest in seeing each other's collections and incidentally, in the renewing of their old acquaintance.

"Yes, I should like to see him," said Rodin, blinking with his weak eyes in the strong light. "I would like to see what life has done to France's features and what it has written on his face."

France, on his part, remarked with some irony but without bitterness:

"I have no objection to our meeting. It is too

dark now in our lives to find many faults with each other. Youth's passion is not likely to erupt in the evening chill."

As he was slightly younger than Rodin he went first to Meudon. The first meeting was as cordial as if they had met but yesterday and it was now Rodin's turn to call.

The dishes France selected were all of valuable Italian porcelain and majolica, painted by first-class artists. He chose those that were rarest. We then turned our attention to the glasses, taking Bohemian crystal for water glasses, slender goblets for the white wine, Italian crystal for the red and French crystal for the champagne. He touched one with a quill and it gave a high resounding echo.

" The glasses which give such a clear sound have survived many kings," said France. " I wonder whether Marie Antoinette took one of these to her lips ? Perhaps that one from which Rodin will drink his champagne. It is the best I have."

" Rodin likes simplicity," I interposed. " Why this luxurious repast ? "

" Who knows how often we can eat together ?

I wish to give him the best as a compensation for not having offered him anything for so long."

He was placing violets on the table-cloth when Rodin arrived. We hastened to meet him.

" The air is as invigorating here as if you were living in a forest," said Rodin gaily, coming up the stairs. We went towards the salon. While ascending the stairs I sized up the men, one of whom was acclaimed as the greatest writer and the other as the greatest sculptor of contemporary France. France was tall, broad-shouldered and stooped. He was so slender that one who did not see his white head would have taken him for a young man. His gait was light, though somewhat uncertain, due to age. He saw everything without looking at it and his glance, I could not help thinking, pierced the mystery of things others could not see. Rodin, on the other hand, was small, strong and as solid as his marble statues. His chest, his back, his shoulders and hands, were powerful and muscular. He walked heavily with his short legs. His Michel Angelo head sat erect on his strong neck.

He blinked his eyes, much to the surprise of those who did not know that he was short-sighted.

"There is no statue here," blurted out Rodin, after having looked through the long salon.

"Not one of them," answered France smilingly.

"Where do you hide your Aphrodite, which, I was told, is so beautiful? I hope you will show it to me."

"It is in my studio, and after resting you can see it. You come from your studio, where you have seen plenty of marble. First we can take a glance at my pictures and the gobelins."

"I am not tired," said Rodin vehemently, "Let us see that Greek goddess first!"

France laughed out loudly at this impetuosity. A hearty laugh was a rare event with him.

"I will show it to you, although, I must confess, I do not like to show it to sculptors."

We ascended the stairs, but Rodin did not even look at the masterpieces hanging on the walls. "He is like the bridegroom hurrying to his bride," said France.

He lifted the heavy curtain of the studio with

his pale small hands, which, in that second, looked like marble.

" What an interesting hand you have ! " exclaimed Rodin, who for the moment forgot all about the Aphrodite.

France knew why his hands were interesting, —from work, meditation, and suffering. He once told me so.

I closed the door of the studio. Rodin took two hurried steps and came to a sudden stop on the blood-coloured Afghan carpet. Aphrodite was in a niche of the window. The lines of her delicate body were sharply drawn against the background of the dark blue curtain. It was like dawn coming out of the night.

We stood there speechless for a long time. The window was half-open. The beauty of the goddess was more striking when bathed in a stream of natural light.

" The artist must have been either Pheidias or one of his great contemporaries," mumbled Rodin wiping the perspiration from his forehead. " This

statue makes me dizzy. It is more beautiful than the Venus de Milo."

Rodin's weak eyes were flaming in a green light.

" This is how we render homage to the goddess of Youth and Beauty," said France, grasping Rodin's hand. " I am of your opinion that this statue is the work either of Pheidias or one of his most talented pupils. In order to ascertain its origin I went to Athens and I am glad I did so because the Minerva of the Parthenon confirmed my supposition. My Aphrodite is like the twin sister of the great Minerva."

" The goddess is hewn in Pentelikon marble, rose-coloured with a golden tint. It is as vivid as if it were real flesh," mused Rodin. " Pheidias used only Pentelikon marble."

Rodin looked at the statue from all sides. He passed his thumb over its round body. Scarcely touching the marble, he felt instinctively its elevations and depressions.

A few years before, when the origin of the Aphrodite was a matter of much discussion, Jean Moréas, the apostle of French symbolical poetry,

wanted Rodin's opinion about it. At that time, however, both France and Rodin rejected the idea of their meeting. Now their grey heads were close together as if the Dreyfus affair had never separated them.

" A Greek girl with a body like a flower must have inspired the artist to create this Aphrodite," commented France.

" This fragile body is built like a cathedral," added Rodin warmly. " The proportions are perfect, every line is well balanced. I am inclined to call it the product of geometric poetry, a hymn in mathematics. An artist always learns without being conscious of it. He learns from his material, his observations and his own thoughts. A sculptor has to learn very much. Pheidias must have been a great scientist."

" Every man of talent develops into a scientist," said France, bidding us to be seated. " Pheidias had a perfect knowledge of anatomy, geometry, and architecture. He was familiar with all the qualities of his material and with the influence of light and shade on the marble. As a scientist

he knew how to check his ardour when it was more prudent to refrain from exaggeration. He was willing to make sacrifices if the harmony of his work so desired. When carving his giants he was always thinking of the whole. Michel Angelo himself learned from him."

"There is no real art without a long line of ancestry," said Rodin. "I do not hesitate to admit that I have learned much from the ancients and Michel Angelo. I had learned very much before I dared model my Balzac. My teachers were, besides the great sculptors, the architects of great cathedrals. Consciously and unconsciously I'm learning even now. Aphrodite's stone-carved beauty, as fresh as it was thousands of years ago, is one of my lessons. Everything about it is as simple as truth."

"What we call truth would bear much discussion," remarked France, stepping up to his Tanagra box. "Let us look at these now."

He took a statuette, scarcely larger than his thumb and gave it to Rodin, who placed it on his palm and remarked :

" This is the ancestor of impressionism. This burnt clay is almost hot, not from the flames of the oven, but from the fast work of the modelling fingers perpetuating in clay the graceful movements of a dancer. Every sculptor of exuberant temperament likes the clay which makes his finger-tips hot. These seemingly calm Tanagras are full of fervour and warmth."

Rodin's thumb passed over the bodies of most of the tiny clay figures.

The bell rang.

" Is someone else coming ? " asked Rodin, and his voice expressed disappointment. " I should have liked to look at all your things : the gladiator, the head of the Medusa, the little Minerva, and the heads of the Greek and Roman savants on the mantelpiece. All your statues are exposed to light in the most advantageous position. A moment ago I should have liked to take down from the mantelpiece that Greek torso but I did not dare touch it. She was so beautiful as the sun's rays fell on her chest and legs. Women's chests on Greek statues are like pears, while on Roman pieces

they are more like apples. The Greek head was oval, the Roman round."

"Monsieur Pierre sent back the books," announced the housekeeper.

"It is very fortunate no one came," rejoiced Rodin, going to the mantelpiece. He stood on his tiptoes and with his short arms took down the head of a haughty Roman. It was a marvellous piece, solid and round and Rodin remarked that the construction of the skull was similar to that of his Balzac.

"There was once in Rome a sculptor," said France, "who saw the head of a Roman in the same way as Rodin saw the head of a French writer."

They laughed at each other. Rodin put the Roman back and took down a Greek head. It was furrowed by a thousand wrinkles. Holding their palms on a level, they balanced the head on their hands. The difference in their hands was striking. France's was like a long leaf on which the network of bluish-green veins branched to the finger-tips. When extended it was quite straight. His thumb, which reached only as high as the root of his index

finger, clung to his palm, timidly and modestly. His hand hung languidly on his wrist. And yet, the muscles between the forearm and palm betrayed great energy and insistence.

Rodin's hand was like his "Hand of God." The veins and muscles burst with life. His short fingers had acquired an almost superhuman sense of touch. The tops of his fingers were extremely well developed. They indicated the high aspirations which throbbed through them and yearned to transfuse his blood into the lifeless matter so that immortal life might spring at its touch. The palm was broad and hollow, never straight. It was made to hold tight the things it grasped. One felt that it could crush into obedience blocks of marble and could create shape and soul according to its own volition. The two palms of the two artists expressed the difference in their lives.

"In spite of the immobility the wrinkles are full of movement," exclaimed Rodin. "When modelling this head the artist must have been thinking of the breeze curling up the water. From nature the Greek sculptors took ornamental

motives. In that respect we have not reached their level even to-day. The wrinkled skin of the Greek is merely the surface which hides unfathomable depths. Wisdom and age change the skull. The upper part of old men's foreheads broadens out. Thinkers have a Moses forehead, exceedingly well developed and strong."

"Look at the deep furrow of this Zeno," exclaimed France. "It stretches from his nose to the corner of his mouth. His tired eyes are sunk into their hollow. He defies life by defying death."

"I see first the form and then the expression. The writer first looks for the expression and then finds the form. You say that this piece represents Zeno. Who was he?" . . .

Rodin took the gladiator from the bookshelf and put it on the desk. We looked at him with amazement. The other day two strong labourers had hardly been able to move it. A ray of light fell on Rodin's chest and the back of the statue.

"Your strength is enviable!"

"I have become strong wrestling with my blocks of marble. What a powerful back and what

splendid muscles this gladiator has! He could hold the globe high, like Atlas and fight until he dropped dead with exhaustion. His body is full of explosive force. Yet, how dignified are his forms, how harmonious the whole. It reflects the balanced unity of the world."

From the garden the sound of mowing penetrated to us. Rodin opened the window and leaned out.

"See! A young man cutting the grass. I like to see mowing. There is rhythm and much force in it."

"Let us go downstairs," suggested France. "I want to show you something before the other two guests arrive."

"We can look at the pictures when they are here."

"It is not pictures I want to show you."

"What is it then? Art is like love, one must not have too much of it. I cannot, in half a day, look at all the things that you have collected in many, many years."

"You will have to come and see me very often."

" Let us look at the ceramics," I suggested seeing the signs of fatigue on the two old faces.

" We can do that," nodded France. " The only trouble is that Josephine, who does not understand and hence does not respect art, exposed them to the whims of the chickens and the cocks. And they respect my beautiful Hindoo and Persian ceramics even less."

" That does not matter," Rodin laughed out loudly. " You know that I keep a couple of doves to help develop patina on my bronzes."

On our way to the terrace we instinctively turned back at the door of the studio. Books, books, all over ! In between white marble statues looking like pale flowers in the dark forest or white-bodied nymphs under the dense foliage. Rodin remarked that the upper portion of the mantelpiece was like the front of a Renaissance palace. There was a bas-relief on its frieze and in front of it several gobelin arm-chairs. The oak table was covered to-day with antique statues, torsos, Florentine bronze bells, quills, Renaissance candlesticks, books and manuscripts. Opposite the table,

Aphrodite, emerging from the dark waves of the curtain, blinded the spectator.

" I thought you would come down," the old housekeeper mumbled morosely. " Hurry up, Marie. Clean up the terrace."

" Stop ! " exclaimed Rodin with feigned indignation. " Do not touch the sacred treasures of kings with your lowly broom. That one which you have already touched must have belonged to the great Darius himself."

" There is no trace left of that king," said the maid laughingly. " This thing now belongs to us; a dead king does not count anyway."

" This village girl is quoting Shakespeare," said France after having sent her away, " although it is not likely she ever read him. Primitive souls have their own wisdom and they teach us many things."

Rodin looked around among the gay ceramics.

" This is an old Persian piece such as I saw the other day in a German book. The colours are exuberant, oriental."

" One can easily understand," France commented, " how delighted the sleepy Persians were

to look at this symphony of blue and green, which reminded them of the ever-changing sea. It dates, as you say, from the time of Darius I, who is also known as Daryavus, the son of Hystaspes, the conqueror of India. I got this piece at Marathon from the relatives of our friend Jean Moréas, who are, as you know, Greeks of noble blood. When they gave it to me they told me a tale.

"The three Dariuses, when their death was near, wanted to take leave of life in a room ornamented with these ceramics of surpassing beauty. It had some magic force, they thought, which facilitated their entering the kingdom of shadows with less pain. Loyal Persians have preserved this piece on which the dying glances of three kings had fallen. Legends have the faculty of embellishing beautiful things and I never investigate what is the truth in a legend. It is so difficult to distinguish truth from the creations of imagination."

"I rely upon intuition to find out the truth," said Rodin.

The Indian ceramics were, we found, full of glory, like the sun. The Hindoo artists mostly

took their topics from the Persians. However, the Persian quadrangles and round figures became arrows and shafts in India. The Indian art, Rodin explained to us, was nearest the old Egyptian.

"Let us not forget," France commented, "that they had gone back to the same source. The old Persian was the ancestor of both Egyptian and Indian art. We can go now to the Greeks. I should like to show you my *stèle funéraire*, the tomb of a Greek poet."

Preparatory to showing his great treasure, France pulled down a window curtain and opened the door facing the garden. Thus he exposed to the most advantageous light the bas-relief of the antique Greek tomb which was found on the highway leading to Athens. The *stèle funéraire* represented a Muse standing at the grave of the poet.

"Where is it?" Rodin exploded when he could no longer control his nerves.

"It is here," pointed out France, "I have hidden it in the shadow of the stairs. My idea was that I should have to pass it on every occasion when entering or leaving the house. On the Athens

road too, it was so situated that every traveller bound for the capital of Attica had to see it. It reminded them that every road led to the same end."

Rodin hurried to the *stèle funéraire*, went away and approached it again. We stood close to him and observed his face. It was purple-red and his eyes were rolling. He was breathing heavily, as always, when in great excitement.

" This tomb is glorious," he gasped. " It makes me intoxicated. This is more beautiful than any of the antique tombs of the Museum of Naples. The Muse breathes—she has just stepped on the fresh grave—I fear she may hurt herself falling on the ground. It is majestic, overawing."

" One seldom finds an artistic creation in our cemeteries," said France. " Most of them are vulgar slabs, which commemorate the lack of an æsthetic feeling in the contemporary man. I shudder at the thought that they will place a monstrosity over my dust. I do not want them to mark my grave. There is not much art in the memorial stones of our Pantheon, either. What little art

there is lacks congenial surroundings among the mementoes of conventionalized sham beauty."

"They put one marble slab on top of the other," grumbled Rodin. "That is what I call the matchbox system. Their chief concern is to crowd as many dead under the dome of the Pantheon as possible. We cannot even die æsthetically."

"We who so love art," interposed France, "should have a mark like this over our dead body."

"Dinner is served," announced the maid. Rodin's face lighted up. He liked to live and live well.

"Since dinner is served, do let us enjoy it thoroughly."

XVIII
THE TRIP TO SOUTH AMERICA

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THE TRIP TO SOUTH AMERICA

IN the shadow of Pozzuoli's cliffs, near Naples, France told me one day :

"A year ago, in the spring of 1919, I was on a South American lecture tour. What a strange coincidence that on the anniversary of the trip I should be so near the place of which I spoke in my lectures. Talking about the gods of Asia, I discussed the history of Baiæ, the fashionable watering place of the ancients, which lies in front of us. I love Baiæ, the show-place of Campania. I love its orange and lemon groves and the intoxicating odour of its olive trees. There the fire of Vesuvius shone to our dreaming poet, Horace, and the melodious rhythm of the splashing sea relieved the pangs of creation."

France seldom spoke of his South American trip. It reminded him of an unfortunate incident in the salon of Mme. de Caillavet. Perhaps, for the first time in his life, France had lost his temper

and as a punishment, banished himself across the ocean. His exile was short and not as unhappy as he had anticipated. Mme. de Caillavet took the incident from its humorous aspect and with her incomparable tact restored their customary relationship.

France went to South America because it was far and because its inhabitants were Latins. Madame Moreno arranged for a lecture tour.

France was an apostle of Latinism. Although ultra-modern in many other respects, he was a champion of Latin education. He persisted in believing in a classical heaven, where it would have been good to live, although he was aware that, due to glaring social inequalities, life in ancient Rome was not all bliss.

He was an epicurean and yet he liked republican Rome for its rugged simplicity. He liked the Latin language, which, he thought, was more concise and expressive than any modern tongue. " In those days men were thinking in ideas and not in words," he would often say. He deplored the modern tendency of rounding up high-sounding mottoes and slogans, instead of penetrating into

the idea and giving the essence of the inexpressible with the aid of a few roughly-hewn words. France was of the opinion that the language of the ancient Latins was the nearest approach to perfection.

He was attracted to South America mainly because he was desirous of studying the reaction of an old Latin civilization to a new ideologic conception. Notwithstanding his protestations to the contrary, France was almost a *chauvin* in the great pride he took in Latin civilization. In this respect his sentiment proved stronger than the prohibitive forces of his intellect. Try as he might, he could not forbid his heart to beat faster when hearing of a new victory of the Latin spirit. Nor could he forbid his eyes to light up with pride when speaking of his kinship with the many cultures which claim descent from the Romans.

France found the "New World" fascinating. Value existed for him in so far as it was artistic or contained some element of art. He was mindful of the artistic possibilities which the opulence of nature in America brought within reaching distance of the humblest of the race. He considered

the Latin nations as artistic *par excellence* ; hence his idea of the mission of the Latins and especially, of the Latin-Americans.

Yet it was not only the potential expansion of art, with South America as a basis, that France saw in his transatlantic trip.

" You know," he once told me, " my opinion of equality before the law is that it forbids the rich and poor alike to beg money in the street and steal bread. During the short time I spent in South America I was inclined to doubt the applicability of this dictum to all parts of the globe. There, it seemed to me, I saw the rudiments of a just and better humanity. However," he added melancholically, " I may have been mistaken. After all, the South Americans are the descendants of Eve as we are. They were conceived in the same sin as we were. They worship the same God. Perhaps it would be better for them not to believe in a revengeful Demiurgus. Perhaps it is they—and we—who are revengeful and punish the millionth generation for the sin of an ignorant woman. Our religion looks too much like man's concoction and our notions of

divinity are too sordid to be of divine origin. The evolution of religions is suspiciously reminiscent of our own dust-born existence. Like most nations which, after having been oppressed, become independent, a religion, after its triumph, becomes different from what it was and only its name and a few symbols remain of its former humble self. Religions are eternally changing and adapting themselves to the tastes, nay, caprices of their followers. Gods are changing even more fundamentally than men. A god becomes irrecognizable in less than a century. The god of the Christians has undergone the most radical change owing to the fact that he rules over a motley crowd: Greeks, Romans and Barbarians. A Greek Apollo is a very distant relative of a Roman Apollo. That poor Communist, Christ, is only a distant relative of Christ the defender of capitalism and the sworn enemy of socialism. He, the humble soul, lives in the imagination of the faithful as a sovereign ruler, enthroned in the midst of the greatest pomp, like the Pope, His terrestrial representative."

While France thus spoke he looked in the

direction of Baiæ. To-day it contains mostly ruins, covered with moss and grass. There is a legend that in the past divers used to bring up precious jewels from the water which covers the remnants of the palaces of Roman nobles and of their mistresses. Lucullus had his winter residence where now there is a hotel for globe-trotting English and Americans. In spite of its decrepitude, this place is still favoured by many who like to come where the sea is calm like the " caressing hand of a fond lover." Amidst the huts of the natives there are the ruins of three pagan shrines dedicated to Diana, Mercury and Venus. On the beach tall Anglo-Saxon women are promenading, tumbling over tiny Italian tots who offer them, at a price much beyond their value, petrified lizards which they have found in the ruins. Guides explain that this was the bath of some ancient beauty and that that was the tomb of Agrippina.

France reminded me :

" Here Rome's greatest men met their lovers. Ambition and politics, business and love, had their meeting-place in Baiæ."

The splashing of the water drew our attention to two dolphins driven too far ashore. They jumped from the water and disappeared again, writhing and waltzing, twisting their slender bodies with clumsy charm. They were whipping the water to an angry foam. The Master enjoyed the ingenuity of their movements, their creative originality. All of a sudden they vanished without a trace.

" The little beast as well as the genius," France commented, " is subject to nature's eternal laws. On this volcanic spot where the dolphins go love-mad, Horace's affection for Leuconoë was born. We owe many of his odes to this great passion. When he came here he scarcely surmised what a great event was in store for him. He had come to restore his failing health. He was not rich and could only afford to spend his time here because Mæcenas paid the bill. Yet Horace was celebrated and idle money-bags looked up to him with admiring envy. It was the vogue to burn incense to him, and a pretty woman once said: ' When Horace speaks the sea ought to hearken.'

" One night he made the acquaintance of a

courtesan whom he called Leuconoë but whose real name was Cynthia. She was beautiful her gait divine. Her villa and garden were the sight of the town. She was rich, a great artist of love. Nobody ever ' cut ' her. Her affection for Horace was genuine ; she loved the fertility of his brains and the divine spark in his eyes."

Solemnly, a fishing barge was swimming by, followed by a vibrating golden stripe on the water. The languid air brought to us the strains of a melancholy song :

" Youth, youth, thou most perishable beauty ! "

" How true these words are," commented France. " Leuconoë was not quite young when she met Horace. She visited the astrologers and asked them what she could expect from the future. Horace was greatly moved by this intemperate curiosity."

Here again the conversation turned to South America. In Buenos Aires, France had lectured about Horace and his love. He spoke about Baiæ, a shrine of Latin culture, to which, he hoped, the artistic renaissance of South America would turn.

France did not like to discourse upon subjects of actuality, although his trip to South America convinced him that young countries are more concerned with the present than with the past. When he did go into the discussion of the topics of the day, as when he threw himself into the battle on the side of Captain Dreyfus, he did so at the prompting of an irrepressible force.

The Master believed in antiquity and in his mission as an apostle of that saturation with beauty which, he could not help thinking, only few men ever attained. He would have liked to wander all over the globe preaching the gospel of a new faith which makes the believer good without the imposition of moral compulsion and the fear of post-mortem punishment. He was a believer in spontaneous morality, inborn, to a certain extent, if proper care is taken and proper environment provided. His credo was a humble self-abasement before nature, the creator and the teacher of the beautiful. It was with this idea in mind that he went to South America to teach and to learn, to elevate and to rise.

XIX
TWILIGHT HOURS

XIX

TWILIGHT HOURS

THE World War and the chaos following it separated me from France for a long time. I had not seen him for ten years when I entrained at Berlin to go to Paris, the fairyland of my youth. I had craved it hopelessly during those ten years, which were for me the years of grief and suffering. At last I came, tired and changed but still thirsty for beauty as France had taught me to see it.

At my little hotel in the Quartier Latin a telegram from France was waiting for me. "I am glad that you are back. Do call Saturday morning at 5, Villa Saïd."

This telegram was sent in answer to mine, which I had addressed to his Touraine home, where he was staying with his wife and grandson. And I with my husband, hurried to that calm street of the Bois de Boulogne district: Villa Saïd.

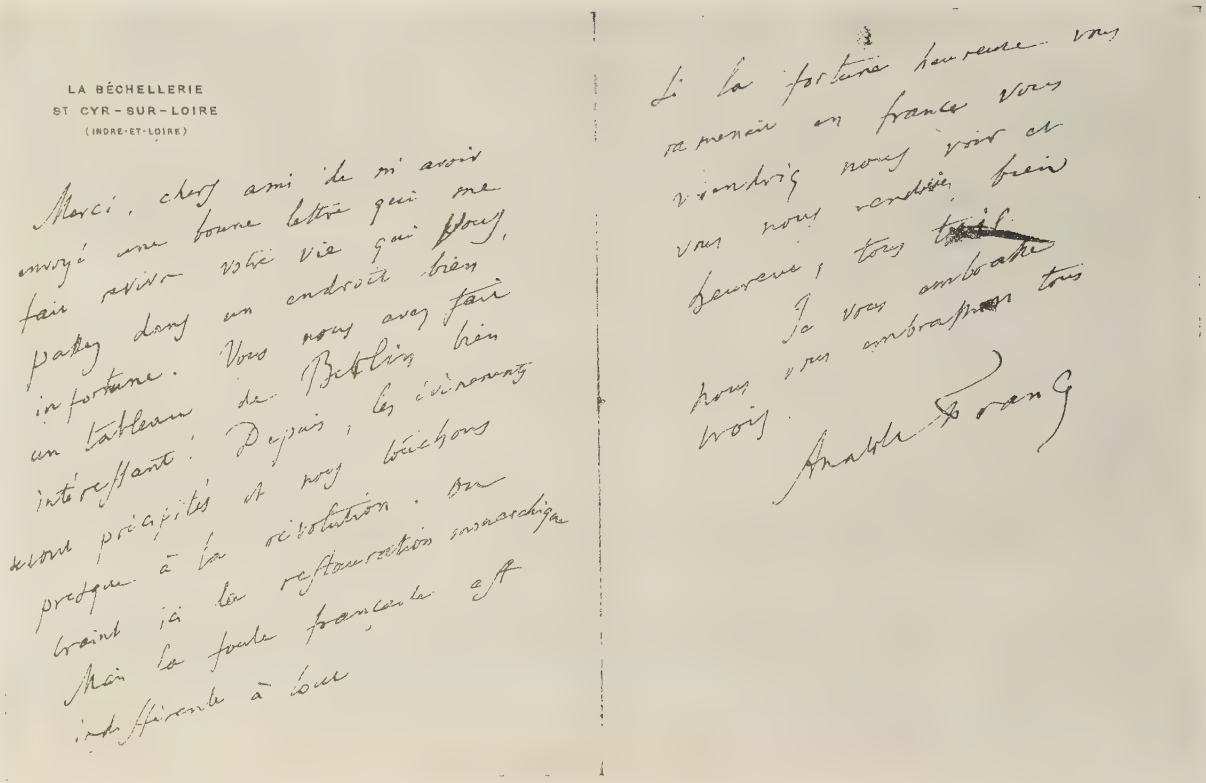
Memories almost swept me off my feet as I stopped in front of the house. How had the

horrible events of war changed the Master ? Did it destroy the faith in man of our beloved infidel ? How did he look at eighty ?

These questions, and many more, were struggling for recognition in my brain, as I waited for the door to be opened. I looked at the villa, which was greatly changed. A new floor was added to it and the windows of the studio apartment were widened. Amid the trees, which had grown taller, the villa had kept on growing proportionately. From the avenue, where thousands of automobiles were racing towards the Bois, the sounds of the metropolis did not reach here. One heard the noise merely as one heard the splashing of the sea in the forest of Dante in Ravenna. The trees of the Villa Saïd tuned down the music of Paris into a charming *sordino*.

The door opened. Did we pull the bronze handle or did the door open by some magic ?

A peasant girl, clad in her native costume, stood in the entrance. Her gaze was rather suspicious on seeing unfamiliar faces. She became more amiable, however, when she learned that we


LA BÉCHELLERIE
ST CYR-SUR-LOIRE
(INDRE-ET-LOIRE)

Merci, cher ami de m'avoir
envoyé une bonne lettre qui me
fait revivre votre vie qui pour
partie dans un endroit bien
infortuné. Vous nous avez fait
un tableau de Petrograd bien
intéressant. Depuis, les événements
sont précipités et nous touchons
presque à la révolution. On
craint ici la restauration anarchique
Mais la foule française est
indifférente à tout

Si la fortune heureuse vous
ramenait en France vous
viendriez nous voir et
vous nous verriez bien
heureux ; tous tr[illegible]
Je vous embrasse
tous
nous vous embrassons tous
Anatole France

A LETTER FROM FRANCE TO THE AUTHOR WRITTEN AT "LA BÉCHELLERIE," EVIDENTLY RELATING TO CONDITIONS AFTER THE WAR

were the guests whom they expected for the morning.

On our way through the hall we saw France coming down the stairs. He held his arms outstretched for a fond embrace. He kissed us passionately. All three of us were so moved that we could say nothing while ascending the stairs. All those questions and many more were on the tip of my tongue. What had happened to him during those cruel days? How much had he suffered for humanity rotting in the trenches, engaged in fratricidal war? France told us everything that had taken place in the meantime.

"Oh, I was very unhappy; my poor wife—you will see her presently—was mute for two years. She went through a grave illness when we bought our little chateau in Touraine. I was in ill-health too and in that condition I was nursing my wife."

He shuddered at the thought of those years and instinctively pulled together his brown coat, as if he had been afraid of a chilling wind. France went on telling us about the events of the past ten years. Every now and then he would interrupt himself,

asking us to tell him our story. I was glad to hear that his voice was still clear and metallic. It took us on its wings throughout the history of the declining years of a great man. I looked at his head and noble features, now showing signs of his age. The two protuberances on his forehead, which seemed to grow when he was reading in the olden days, were no longer there. His eyebrows were bushier and closer to each other. Though his eyes were youthful and brilliant, they were flanked by many lines. His nose, which formerly was on the same level with his forehead, was now slightly inclined over his mouth, in which many teeth were missing. His hair and beard were silkier and at the same time, more dishevelled. His gait was not so sure and elastic as it was when we were in Italy ; neither was his posture so erect.

He complained of bodily ailments, which he attributed not to organic troubles but to old age. Mentally he was as alert as ever. He was, perhaps, more progressive in his political ideas than he had been before. One of his friends and political opponents, M. Maurras, of the *Action Francaise*, the

Royalist daily, pointed out in this connection that the weakness of character of France was a legend. No one knew better than he how to protect the integrity of his political credo against the influence of his friends. He wrote "Les Dieux ont Soif" after the Dreyfus affair, when his progressivism had become deeply rooted and when he lived among Socialists. France liked the Communists and Socialists, according to Maurras, because he found them picturesque. My opinion at that time was that France liked progressivism because he lived in the future, when what is "revolutionary" to-day will probably be called conservative or even reactionary.

The more I listened to him on that Saturday morning the stronger grew my conviction that he had changed only externally. His wisdom was as profound as when he was at the climax of his productive power. The fire of his enthusiasm was flaming in his eyes and was glowing in his dynamic words.

While we were sitting in the little salon France cast frequent glances towards the door.

"She will come presently," I said, in order to allay his uneasiness. "Women have a thousand little things to do."

"Of course, I know," he smiled understandingly. "That is why I admire women. Harassed by so many trivial things, they do not lose their heads. Patient and persistent, they reach what they consider their goal."

His old ironic vein almost got the best of him. But now he restrained himself. The door opened slowly, timidly. A lovely blonde woman, modest, dressed in black, came to us. We kissed each other affectionately, and immediately engaged in an animated conversation.

"Do you see, my little one," asked France lovingly, "how my '*chers enfants*' have remained?"

"We are old children, Master," and I pointed to my white hair.

Since their marriage France and his wife live mostly in their chateau in the Touraine. Until a few years ago he had liked to travel. After he had been awarded the Nobel Prize he went to Stockholm, where he was royally received. Although

Latin civilization was closer to him, he showed great understanding for the culture of the Nordic nations. He had been to Germany too and called on Professor Einstein, the discoverer of relativity.

He began to speak about the Germans. He liked their energy and industry, their ability to organize and he praised them for the order they maintained in their country. He wanted to have our opinion whether Poincaré's policy had harmed the cause of democracy in Germany and whether the Germans cherished any thoughts of revenge, as the French Nationalist papers tried to make his countrymen believe. He was extremely sympathetic for the inhabitants of Berlin who had gone through so many vicissitudes. He knew well that it was mostly the poor and the weak who had to pay for the crimes of the rich and the strong.

When we went over to the studio I noticed that everything was in the same place as when I was there ten years ago, the gobelin arm-chair, the desk, the old inkstand with the quill, the slender crystal vase. The familiar books were on the shelves, Molière, Corneille, Racine, Voltaire and

Tacitus, Virgil, Horace and Lucretius. The Tanagra figurine was in the corner and the Roman and Greek statues on the mantelpiece.

Through the open window the sun shone on his forehead as France sat at the desk. He no longer wore any eyeglasses. When he noticed mine he teased me, asking what good they did to me.

He invited us to his house in Touraine, "*La Béchellerie*." He asked his wife which rooms to give us. It happened that the guest rooms were not yet furnished.

"We will furnish them in the meantime," suggested France, and added with a teasing glance in his eyes, "We will hang the pictures ourselves."

Since France first hung the pictures in my room on the Place Dauphine he had come many times to rearrange them. The Dürer picture had caused him much trouble before he found for it a more suitable place on the wall. In one place it was the reflection of the Seine which deprived it of its effect, in another it was the shadow cast by the trees. Finally he moved away a chest of drawers and a sofa and found the right place for the picture.

Sometimes he would spend whole afternoons in his home arranging a Goya portrait or his two Rembrandts.

One evening when we called again on France we found his grandson in a very depressed mood. He told us his grandfather had been sleeping in his arm-chair the whole day and that since his last illness he was very feeble.

It was the last time, except for a short moment, that I saw him.

THE END

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